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Monday, June 19, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 19, 2017

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES ACT

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.) moved that Bill C-344, An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (community benefit), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House with the support of the hon. member for Don Valley North to introduce my private member's bill, Bill C-344, an act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act to introduce community benefits.

I would like to take this moment to thank the residents of my riding of Brampton Centre for giving me the opportunity to introduce the bill and for electing me as the first member of Parliament for Brampton Centre.

Bill C-344 would further strengthen the federal infrastructure investment in communities, such as in my riding, and throughout Canada.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the member for York South—Weston for his extensive work on his previous private member's bill. At the committee hearing, two amendments to Bill C-227 were suggested by the committee. Hence my bill, Bill C-344, is before the house today.

Community benefit agreements, referred to as CBAs, create socio-economic opportunities for local communities and neighbourhoods as well as environmental benefits as a result of federal development projects across Canada. These benefits include local job creation, apprenticeships, affordable housing, education, support for seniors, health care, and other key benefits for communities.

Bill C-344 would amend section 20 of the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act. This would include a provision that would enable the Minister of Public Services and Procurement to require successful bidders on federal projects to

report information on community benefits. This provision would ultimately create a platform to minimize possible delays and promote flexibility for community infrastructure development.

CBAs would enable the ministry of public services and procurement to formulate agreements with federal infrastructure developers with added input from community groups. These agreements would lay the foundation to encourage local communities to build partnerships with developers. Ultimately, CBAs would strengthen the socio-economic influence of publicly funded development projects.

For example, in my riding of Brampton Centre, federal investments into infrastructure have greatly contributed to social development in the community. The Züm bus rapid transit fund has revolutionized transit infrastructure across the City of Brampton and has attracted approximately \$95 million of federal investment. Further, a federal investment of \$69 million in a stormwater management project in Peel region has greatly contributed to improving the quality of life in the community. However, had CBAs been tied to these investments, the overall impact could have been much greater. Communities across Canada rely on federal investments to fund development projects, so if CBAs are tied to these federal investments, communities would thrive.

This was evident in the city of Vancouver, where the 2010 Olympic Village was built under a CBA. This initiative allowed communities to have a direct input on the project.

Bill C-344 would allow for comprehensive consultations with communities across Canada, consequently strengthening local infrastructure investments. It would also reduce red tape for small and medium-sized businesses and further accelerate the approval process for federal repair and construction projects.

• (1110)

Moreover, various business groups and organizations support the concept of CBAs. The boards of trade for Brampton, Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, and various unions, have endorsed CBAs as a strong economic policy and an optimal way to promote youth employment.

Private Members' Business

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, referred to as HUMA, I have first-hand experience of the harsh realities of poverty in Canada. This committee has conducted a study with recommendations on a national poverty reduction strategy that was submitted to this Parliament. It is quite evident that CBAs will promote increased prosperity and drastically reduce poverty in communities across Canada.

Further, a joint report from the Mowat Centre and the Atkinson Foundation found that CBAs have the ability to promote a better environment for unique areas. In Ontario alone, the provincial government will invest \$130 billion into public infrastructure over the next 10 years. The federal government has committed more than \$180 billion into transit, green, and social infrastructures. As such, this is the time to collaborate with communities so they can also benefit from such lucrative federal investments.

CBAs will ultimately enhance the socio-economic development of cities across Canada. CBAs have already been implemented in Ontario with the enactment of the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act. This act aims to remove any red tape so that the approval process for provincial infrastructure investment projects can be more efficient.

Furthermore, a number of organizations, including Metrolinx and the Toronto Community Benefits Network, have signed a community benefits framework, the first in Ontario.

The U.S.A. and the U.K. have already adopted the CBA concept into their respective infrastructure investments. In the U.S.A., CBA success stories include the Atlanta Beltline project, the Los Angeles airport expansion, and the Los Angeles Grand Avenue project. One stipulation on these projects was the requirement to submit reports on the benefits derived for communities. Provinces such as Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Manitoba are also in the process of adopting the CBA concept.

Bill C-344 would authorize the Minister of Public Services and Procurement to require bidders to provide a detailed explanation of how government-funded projects will benefit the community. It would also require the minister to report to Parliament on an annual basis on what community benefits have been implemented.

Bill C-344 is about implementing CBAs in the federal jurisdiction. This will give added responsibility to the Government of Canada to exercise leadership in implementing CBAs across Canada. Ultimately, CBAs will create the foundation for communities to earn their fair share of federal infrastructure investment. This will ensure that communities have reliable growth and meaningful employment while fostering a healthier environment.

• (1115)

This is an extraordinary opportunity for the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario to have CBAs preserved in law. This can serve as a model for other jurisdictions to follow. It is about ensuring that future federal infrastructure projects would generate community benefits for all Canadians coast to coast to coast.

I therefore humbly invite all my colleagues in this House to support Bill C-344, an act to amend the Department of Public Works

and Government Services Act (community benefit) so that communities across Canada can have access to enhanced infrastructure developments.

Besides the tangible benefits offered by CBAs, they will also serve as a vehicle for the pursuit of dignity and rebuild the core infrastructure of Canadian communities that are eagerly awaiting them.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know it is very honourable to present a bill and I understand it is a private member's bill, but certainly, with all due respect to the member, we must not have read the same bill, because he stated twice—not once, but twice—that the bill would reduce red tape. However, on the contrary, small and medium-sized enterprises would now have to produce a report to the minister that specifies the community benefit, and it is to his discretion concerning which benefits there will be.

Can the member explain to me how he can actually see the bill as a reduction of red tape when it is contrary to what is in the bill?

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, this bill is with regard to communities, involvement of the communities, benefit for the communities, so that the communities get the benefit from the bill. There is no possibility of any delays or red tape, which my friend seems to be apprehensive about.

The communities will be involved. The communities themselves are willing to take these responsibilities. They will come forward to help developers, to help the government, to quicken the process of the bill, so there is no possibility of red tape. Rather it is a win-win situation, and the communities will have the best benefits out of the bill.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague from Brampton Centre could clarify the scope of the bill. Does it apply only to infrastructure that is entirely funded by the federal government, which would be a very small subset of public infrastructure, or does it apply to infrastructure that is cost-shared among the federal government, provinces, and municipalities. If so, how would the government plan to negotiate community benefits with provinces and municipalities?

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-344 just addresses community benefits. Federal infrastructure spending investments would be invested into the local community. From that investment, local communities will get further benefit for the community itself.

The bill will involve government representatives and the local community at large, so this bill will give power to the community to collaborate with a partnership and have their own say about infrastructure. Surely they will feel that they are getting their fair share of the federal infrastructure spending, and they will get it.

Private Members' Business

● (1120)

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague could shed some light on why this is such an important leadership approach, where the federal government is actually identifying and changing the conversation so that when industries invest in projects they are able to make them around community benefits.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, today there is a need for communities to be involved in the function of government and into infrastructure. They know that some infrastructure is going to be built in their communities, so they want to be involved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will continue this debate in French. I wish to inform you that Her Majesty's official opposition will oppose this private member's bill and vote against it.

I hate to rain on anyone's parade, and I know the bill sponsor is not going to like this, but we will be voting against the bill for some eminently sensible reasons that I will explain.

I would like to comment on the member for Brampton Centre's speech. The government's role is to allow everyone to compete. When it grants contracts to third parties, parties outside the government, such as small and medium-sized businesses, big businesses, and organizations, it must ensure that RFPs are written so as to maximize everyone's opportunity. That means minimizing paperwork and constraints, which can be obstacles for some small and medium-sized businesses that want to bid. In Canada, such businesses have fewer resources than large construction companies, for example.

The member said the bill would provide flexibility in granting contracts. That is ironic, because the opposite is true. This bill will make the RFP process, which is open to everyone, more cumbersome.

He also said that this would help communities. I only wish that were the case, but after reading the bill, which contains almost no details and consists of only one page and three clauses, I can find no indication that any assistance will be provided to communities. What will happen, however, is that small and medium-sized businesses will be subject to greater constraints and more red tape. I would like to believe the member when he says he wants to help Canadian communities and municipalities, but that is not at all what the bill appears to do. I say this with some reservation, since that is my interpretation, although it is also how the opposition sees it.

In addition, speaking of economic benefits for local communities, the member referred to the Olympic Village in Vancouver. That was one of the largest projects undertaken in Canada in recent years, and it is hardly the kind of local benefits our colleague was referring to in his bill, in other words, infrastructure such as bridges and so on. The Olympic Village in Vancouver was a megaproject involving huge Canadian corporations that are accustomed to being very efficient and getting sizable returns. They have good relationships with the government and are capable of meeting project deadlines, as was the case for the Olympic Games.

Vancouver's Olympic Village was in fact the worst example that the member could have used to illustrate how his bill would benefit the community, or at least help small businesses.

The member said not once, but twice that this bill would cut down on paperwork and red tape and reduce the number of forms small businesses have to fill; that was the point of the question I asked him. In fact, the opposite is true. The specific focus of the bill is to now make small businesses fill out a form for the minister; the community benefits will therefore be at his discretion. The very purpose of the bill is to create paperwork. It is an incredible thing to say that it will cut red tape.

That was my introduction.

Last week, during my speech on the 2017 budget, I said that the purpose of most of the Liberal bills introduced over the past two years has been to benefit certain special interest groups.

● (1125)

These bills are not introduced for the benefit of Canadians in general, that is, all individual Canadians, but rather to help special interest groups. I believe Bill C-344 to be a prime example of this government's legislative proclivity.

I would also like to remind members how the bill came to be. It was first introduced by the current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship as Bill C-227. It was then dropped from the Order Paper a few months ago, after the member was appointed to cabinet, only to return to it later.

The member said that this bill was significant, fundamental and necessary for Canada in that it will allow communities to make their needs known given the expected benefits of a given project. If that were the case, why is this not a bill that the government would want to introduce? Why is it not a government bill?

While I can appreciate that this is not within the current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship's portfolio, why did he not bring this bill forward as quickly as possible? This could have been settled a few months ago. If this were such an effective and important bill, it could have been passed months ago.

The fact that the Liberals removed this bill from the Order Paper and then put it back shows that they likely thought it was inconsequential since there is not much to it. They probably figured that they would just hand it over to some MP so that he could introduce a bill. I know how it goes. It is good to give hon. members the chance to introduce bills, but this bill is essentially going to harm small and medium-sized businesses.

Let me get into the technical details of the bill before it is too late. We in the opposition have identified some problems. There are no criteria in this bill for how small and medium-sized businesses are to respond to the minister's mandatory assessment. There are no criteria, directives, guidelines, or substantive information in this bill indicating precisely how SMEs have to fill out the form.

Private Members' Business

There is no indication of the criteria, the length of the form, or whether anthropologists and sociologists will have to analyze every little spinoff from the project, whether environmental, economic, or social. What is more, subclause 21.1(1) of the bill states:

...any other specific benefit identified by the community.

I think we can all agree that this could have a major impact on what could be required of small and medium-sized businesses when they fill out the form. For example, if a municipality decides to assess the community benefits for a certain historic group, such as indigenous people, the input of anthropologists and historians will certainly be required. Just imagine if a small or medium-sized business in Toronto, for example, where the member is from, was required to hire anthropologists and sociologists before building a bridge. That is completely ridiculous.

Another problem is that it is left up to the minister's discretion whether a form explaining the community benefits will need to be filled out. The minister will also decide whether or not to present the report on community benefits to Parliament. The bill cannot be that serious if the minister can choose not to apply its provisions. The bill states:

A contracting party shall, upon request by the Minister, provide the Minister with an assessment as to whether community benefits have derived from the project.

I will close by mentioning the worst part, which is that the minister could request a report on the community benefits after the bids have already been submitted and after the SME has already finished the work. However, we know that contracting parties need to have a good idea of how much things will cost before work begins. What the government is telling them is that, after the work is done, they may have to meet other requirements that will cost them more money.

This is a truly a bad piece of legislation as it now stands. It must be sent to committee or even killed because it is just a source of red tape and does not contain any clear directions.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard that the Conservatives will be opposing this bill because it lacks specifics but they see the potential for negative consequences. We in the NDP are a hopeful and optimistic party, so despite the bill's lack of specifics we will be supporting it because we see the potential for it to be quite positive legislation. We will also be proposing amendments at committee to try to set out some of those needed specifics. We certainly support the concept of community benefit agreements, trying to ensure that public infrastructure investment creates local jobs and local training opportunities and that it really enriches the local community.

One of the main purposes the government has provided for infrastructure investment is to boost the Canadian economy. Of course, infrastructure spending only boosts the economy to the extent that it employs Canadian workers and procures Canadian-made inputs. However, the current government has a very weak track record of actually making an effort to use procurement policy in that way.

We see, for example, the construction of the new Champlain Bridge using only 19% Canadian-made steel. Even as we have steel mills struggling through bankruptcy protection and laying off workers, the Canadian government is importing a huge amount of steel to build this new bridge. This would be a great example of where the concept of community benefits could be put into effect in a very useful way. Therefore, I agree with basically everything that the member for Brampton Centre said; I am just somewhat skeptical that this bill would actually achieve the laudable goals that the member set forward.

The first thing that is important to emphasize is that this bill would not require community benefit agreements. It would not even require contractors to provide information on community benefits. What it would do is allow the minister to require contractors to provide this information. Therefore, in the hands of a very energetic and proactive minister, it is possible that this bill could be used as a tool to help negotiate community benefit agreements, but it would not actually require the government to do anything of the sort.

Another very important issue is the scope of this legislation. I asked the member for Brampton Centre whether it would apply only to infrastructure that is entirely funded by the federal government, which is very little infrastructure, or whether it would apply to infrastructure that the federal government cost-shares with other levels of government. We did not get any kind of a clear answer to that question, but this is a real issue and it came up at committee when this bill's predecessor, Bill C-227, went before the transport committee. The government essentially tried to indicate that Bill C-227 would only apply to infrastructure totally funded by the federal government, which means it would not apply to very much infrastructure at all.

We believe that a more realistic proposal would be to apply this legislation to infrastructure that the federal government cost-shares with other levels of government, but of course that would require a lot more detail and a lot more information about how the federal government would reconcile its objectives in terms of community benefits with those of provincial and municipal governments. I believe there is the potential for the federal government to work together with provinces and municipalities in quite a constructive fashion to achieve community benefit agreements. However, that is something we should be acknowledging and discussing, rather than talking about this bill as though it would only apply to the very small subset of infrastructure that is entirely paid for by the federal government itself.

Another issue I would like to raise regarding this bill is the lack of evaluation or monitoring. If we were to have a successful strategy to implement community benefit agreements, we would want a very good mechanism to report back on whether the benefits were actually achieved.

• (1135)

What this bill talks about is the minister providing a report on community benefits, which could be almost anything. The minister could easily just pick and choose projects that had some community benefits, and highlight those and trumpet those. It would be very easy for the minister to just put forward a positive report without actually doing much analysis or without really evaluating anything.

Private Members' Business

We believe it would make a lot more sense for this bill to actually require the minister to report on whether community benefits were achieved, so that we have some actual evaluation of whether all the money that the government is spending on public infrastructure is actually creating local jobs, providing apprenticeship opportunities, improving local communities, and improving our natural environment. We believe that this bill requires a lot more detail in terms of reporting and evaluation.

Another issue that is very important to discuss is how this bill fits with international trade agreements. The government has been very aggressive in signing onto trade deals that limit the public sector's ability to use procurement policy to require local employment, the purchasing of local inputs, and that sort of thing.

One of the questions that came up at committee with this bill's predecessor, Bill C-227, was whether it actually fit in with some of the trade deals that the government has signed. We have not gotten a very clear answer on this from the government, but I believe it is an important question. I do not bring it up as an argument against community benefit agreements. I think we want to pursue community benefit agreements, but we also want to make sure we are not negotiating trade agreements that take away the ability of government to use procurement policy in that way.

What I fear about this bill is that it actually contains so little that maybe it does comply with international trade agreements but it complies with them only because it requires so little of the government or of contractors. It is essentially totally up to the minister whether to even require information on community benefits. It seems as though the bill may not actually apply to very much infrastructure, if it is only those few projects that are entirely funded by the federal government. I hope the answer is not that this bill complies with international trade agreements because it does not actually do anything and it does not require anything.

Now, of course, we do have a number of trade agreements that apply to infrastructure that is entirely funded by the federal government. Where our country has more latitude to use procurement policy in a constructive way is with provincial and municipal infrastructure. Fortunately, most infrastructure is indeed also funded by those levels of government. However, the government does not seem to want to say that this bill would apply to those projects.

The NDP very much supports community benefit agreements. We want to see public investment in infrastructure supporting jobs in local communities, providing apprenticeship opportunities, improving the local area, and supporting a clean environment. A way of actually achieving that would be for the federal government to negotiate community benefit agreements in concert with provincial and municipal governments for infrastructure projects that are jointly funded. That would have an effect on a lot of infrastructure and would also comply with international trade agreements.

Unfortunately, we are getting the suggestion from the government that this would only apply to those few projects that are totally federally funded and, in that case, might not fit in with Canada's international trade obligations.

In conclusion, we in the NDP are going to support this bill, but we are going to support it with the view to getting it to committee so that we can amend it into a constructive and positive piece of legislation.

• (1140)

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill C-344, an act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act, community benefit.

Bill C-344 would amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act to provide the minister of public services and procurement with the authority to require an assessment of the benefits that a community derives from a construction, maintenance, or repair project. Under the bill, the minister may require bidders on a contract to provide information on a project's community benefits. The minister may also request an assessment as to whether community benefits have been derived from a project.

Finally, the bill would require the minister to table an annual report in Parliament on community benefits provided by construction, maintenance, or repair projects.

[*Translation*]

In simple terms, the goal of the bill is to ensure that taxpayer money invested in the repair and construction of federal infrastructure is used to produce useful local benefits, such as training, jobs, and environmental benefits.

The goals of this bill are laudable and I encourage all members in the House to support it.

[*English*]

There are three compelling reasons for supporting this bill. The first is that the government should use its spending power to create jobs, promote economic growth, and foster a more prosperous society. Certainly, this is one of our government's priorities and is in keeping with the mandate of the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

The minister was mandated to:

Modernize procurement practices so that they are simpler, less administratively burdensome, deploy modern comptrollership, and include practices that support our economic policy goals, including green and social procurement.

Bill C-344 aligns squarely with these objectives. If enacted, Bill C-344 would help support the government's effort in leveraging procurement to advance social and green policies for the benefit of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The second reason to support this bill is that the concept of community benefits is already well established in the United Kingdom and the United States and is gaining popularity at the local and provincial levels here in Canada. Bill C-344 is a perfect opportunity for the federal government to show leadership and adopt the concept of community benefits on behalf of the entire country. For example, the concept of community benefits was applied in building the athletes' village for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

Private Members' Business

More recently, Ontario passed the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 and became the first province to include community benefits in provincial infrastructure projects, putting emphasis on hiring, training, and buying local. An excellent example of the results of this approach is the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown light rail line in Toronto, a public transit project worth several billion dollars that now includes an agreement regarding community benefits.

As part of that initiative, provincial and municipal partners set the objective that 10% of trade and craft hours required for the project must be carried out by apprentices and journeypersons who live along the public transit corridor and who have had difficulty finding work. The cost is the same, but part of the cost of labour is better directed to advance things on the social front. That project has the possibility of changing the lives of young people, who will then be able to obtain training or a job.

• (1145)

[*English*]

At the same time, Bill C-344 would not impose much in the way of additional procedures on either the government or private sector suppliers. The bill does not call for changing the criteria in the tendering process. The minister's annual report to Parliament would simply provide an additional level of transparency and accountability to Canadians as to how their money is being spent and the positive impact it is having on their communities.

Third, this bill is consistent with the approach of the investing in Canada plan. The Government of Canada is making historic new investments in infrastructure, more than doubling existing funding to build the cities of the 21st century and provide communities across the country with the tools they need to prosper and innovate. Our historic investments are bringing about transformational change in our communities.

An example of a project that brings great community benefit is the Champlain Bridge, which crosses into my riding.

[*Translation*]

The new Champlain Bridge corridor is one of the largest infrastructure projects in North America. In addition to ensuring the safety of users, the proposed corridor will create thousands of jobs in the greater Montreal area and foster economic growth in Canada by improving the network's connectivity and the continuous and safe flow of people and goods.

[*English*]

Another great example is the Gordie Howe bridge. The Government of Canada is committed to the Gordie Howe international bridge, a strategic trade corridor with our country's most important economic partner. It is an example of the infrastructure investments being made to help grow the economy, create good middle-class jobs, and enhance trade and productivity in our local communities and across the country.

The Gordie Howe international bridge will encourage new investment between Canada and the United States and help to maintain and create thousands of jobs and opportunities on both sides of the border. The new bridge is of vital importance to the

economic prosperity of communities and businesses on both sides of the border and is expected to create thousands of construction jobs in Ontario. In addition to the jobs created during the construction of the project, the new bridge will result in many permanent jobs for the future operation of the crossing. As well, it is expected that thousands of jobs will be created in businesses that will supply goods and raw materials for the project.

This is the opportune time to ensure that we are reinvesting in our communities. By investing in the things that help make our neighbourhoods better places to live, like affordable housing, cultural institutions, and recreational facilities, we can build stronger neighbourhoods and communities that we are all proud to call home.

I have had the opportunity as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to go to different parts of the country and get full feedback from mayors and city councillors, some of the hardest-working people in the public service, and they tell me how important it is to get local feedback and talk about the expertise that exists in those communities and to reflect the needs in our infrastructure projects. We know that the federal government cannot just walk in and invest without consulting and without talking to the provinces. Frankly, the expertise lies in a number of these projects. We rely on them and we need them, whether it is talking to provincial governments, talking to community leaders, talking to individuals as to what their needs are, or talking to our indigenous communities. These are key things, and this is part and parcel of Bill C-344. It fits perfectly within the framework we are creating to build the 21st century.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

By investing in infrastructure now, in the projects that Canada needs and in the men and women who can carry them out, we can strengthen and grow the middle class and make Canada a better place to live.

I see Bill C-344 as another way of ensuring that federal procurement helps the government obtain real benefits and results for Canadians and our communities.

[*English*]

I would like to take the time to congratulate the sponsor of this private member's bill, the member for Brampton Centre, for proposing a piece of legislation that is extremely difficult to argue against, particularly in light of his extreme advocacy in the community for the community benefits from any federal investment. The bill's underlying principles and objectives are laudable, and Bill C-344 warrants the support of the House.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-344, an act that would provide the minister with the authority to require an assessment of the benefits a community would derive from a construction, maintenance, or repair project. The bill's author, I am sure, has good intentions behind bringing the bill forward, but we all know where the road paved with good intention leads.

Private Members' Business

The practical considerations of federal procurement and the effects of more regulations on small and medium enterprises when entering into the federal bidding process cannot be ignored. The federal procurement process is one of the most complex processes in government. It takes months to finalize an RFP, solicit bids, modify the RFP, narrow down bidders, and negotiate a contract, all to finally accept a proposal that could very well be cancelled or delayed. I am not sure it would be possible to design a more convoluted system if we tried, although it appears that the government has been working very hard to ensure that nothing surpasses it.

For example, the bid from Alenia Aermacchi North America weighed some 2,700 kilograms, while Airbus Defence and Space needed a U-Haul to deliver 1,500 kilograms of documents to Public Services and Procurement Canada for the fixed-wing search and rescue bid. Even with such a detailed RFP process, the government has managed to get us sued for not providing proper information to the bidders.

One of the significant reasons federal procurement has become so complex is that politicians have seen fit to increase the number of conditions required before a contract can be awarded. Some of the conditions are to ensure greater financial transparency and are objectively good and practically necessary to prevent corruption. However, some conditions, like those proposed in Bill C-344, are well-intentioned but serve only to make a complicated process more complex. It is one thing to propose that companies submit a community assessment as part of their bid, as per proposed subsection 20.1(2) of the legislation, but it is completely another thing to allow such ambiguous power to sit with the minister. "The Minister may...require bidders...to provide information", it reads. It is not "always", but "may". It is not if the contract is this size or that size.

What better way to open this up to lawsuits than to give the minister such an undefined power? Who is to decide what is the best social benefit? What parameters are to be used to decide if an environmental benefit from one bidder is superior to another but provides no social benefit? Who decides if a slight social benefit outweighs a much lower price and therefore gets the contract? What is to stop the government from using such vagueness for partisan benefit?

Here is a list of investigations of actual issues that have arisen and have been published on the website of the Office of the Procurement Ombudsman. There are 31 posted, and all but five concern issues that would be made worse by such undefined items in Bill C-344. They read:

1. Ombudsman recommends compensation to bidder who was treated unfairly

With Bill C-344, we would have an unclear process.

2. Request for proposal with unclear estimates impacts a bidding process
3. Departmental delays impede a supplier's ability to submit a bid
4. Were contractual obligations met by the federal organization?
6. The onus to demonstrate how a proposal meets the evaluation criteria...

Again, that goes right back to Bill C-344 and its vagueness.

7. Organization properly awarded the contract, but may have unnecessarily limited the pool of potential suppliers
8. Compensation recommended for a supplier whose proposal was improperly rejected

10. Poorly written solicitations can cause confusion for suppliers
11. Department's approach to soliciting proposals was not consistent with government policy
12. Was a supplier disadvantaged by an unreasonable criterion?
13. A mandatory criterion questioned
15. Excessive criteria for the work to be done?

The list goes on. I am not even halfway through.

16. Department did not indicate the basis of selection to award a contract
17. Compensation recommended for supplier whose bid was wrongfully rejected.

This goes back to who is deciding on a social benefit versus an environmental benefit.

18. Did the department adhere to the terms and conditions of the Standing Offer?
19. Are subject-matter experts required to evaluate proposals?
20. Supplier's bid wrongfully deemed non-compliant on the basis of undisclosed evaluation criteria
21. Did a department act in a fair, open and transparent manner?
22. Were suppliers discouraged from bidding and others given an advantage?
23. Evaluation criteria not applied as stated in the bid solicitation
24. Did the department evaluate supplier bids using the same criteria?

Again, there are no criteria set out in Bill C-344.

25. Mandatory bid evaluation criteria not identified or applied appropriately: Supplier compensated

This goes back to the Minister "may" ask for such information but not always.

26. Did solicitation documents include contradictory wording?

● (1155)

27. Was there a conflict of interest or unfair advantage in the award of the contract?
30. Mandatory evaluation bid criteria based on operational requirements but the rationale not communicated
31. Department did not act in bad faith but need for better communication

What is the cost going to be for taxpayers? In the operations and estimates committee, we asked both the deputy minister and the associate deputy minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada if an analysis had been done of the effects of Bill C-344 on costs from the added red tape and bureaucracy, etc. Shockingly, for a government that goes on ad nauseam about evidence-based decision-making, neither had heard of Bill C-344, nor could they say if any analysis had been done on possible effects on the procurement process.

Seeing as the minister is on leave and her fill-in has been AWOL on such issues as Phoenix, the fighter jet procurement disaster, and the Shared Services paper shredding scandal, it is no surprise to see that this bill has had zero investigation into the ramifications.

Private Members' Business

I am not the only who opposes adding bureaucratic red tape to a process that is already the gold standard for red tape. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says:

Attempts by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to access federal procurement are consistently hampered by a confusing application processes, excessive paperwork and a complex system of rules.

One of the CFIBs suggestions was, "Make the procurement process an integral part of any red tape reduction initiative." Note that it did not say to please add to the red tape.

The practical considerations of more bureaucracy are very real. The procurement ombudsman states that one of the continuing problems is that the complexity of the system scares small and medium-sized businesses away from engaging in federal procurement. In his 2015-16 annual report on procurement, the ombudsman noted examples of complaints from suppliers:

Cumbersome and burdensome solicitations, more specifically the amount of paperwork and time required to respond to solicitations, act as disincentives for suppliers.

Short bidding periods make it difficult for suppliers to respond to the often extensive requirements in solicitations....

Communications barriers or challenges, including in obtaining debriefs from federal organizations on the shortcomings of unsuccessful bids after the award of contracts or concerns about a perceived lack of details provided through debriefs....

Delays in launching procurements, or lengthy procurement processes, are resulting in increased costs for suppliers and federal organizations.

Take each item and relate it to Bill C-344's effects on the process. I cannot see how the legislation would make RFPs less cumbersome, less expensive, or less extensive or provide more clarity. Again, Bill C-344 ignores the existing problems within procurement and will increase complaints from small businesses.

As mentioned, Bill C-344 is vague in that it does not clearly define what constitutes a social, economic, or environmental benefit a community derives.

This problem of disincentives touches on another complaint heard by the procurement ombudsman, who noted that new businesses are unable or unwilling to break into the procurement market because of the substantial knowledge barrier to entry.

I support small and medium-sized businesses and believe that the government should be doing more to encourage SMEs to submit bids, create jobs, and grow our economy. Adding more requirements, bureaucracy, and ill-defined powers are not ways to bring down costs, simplify the process, and address the consistent concerns brought forward by businesses on the procurement process.

The minister's own mandate letter states:

Modernize procurement practices so that they are simpler, less administratively burdensome....

Bill C-344 would move government procurement in the exact opposite direction. The government should read the Prime Minister's own mandate letter to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and reject this bill.

• (1200)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Brampton Centre for bringing forward his private member's legislation.

I rise today in support of Bill C-344, which would require an assessment of the benefits that a community would derive from a construction, maintenance, or repair project. This common-sense legislation will have many benefits for Canadian communities.

In 2015, we campaigned on historic infrastructure investments. The bill would add community benefit to the our investment and construction goals. The ministry already receives submissions on cost and time of construction, however, there is no policy that requires contractors to assess what benefits a project would offer to our communities. Bill C-344 would address this gap in the current procurement policies.

Bill C-344 also speaks to the triple bottom line, which I have adopted, that emphasizes social, economic, and environmental innovation.

Community benefit agreements are a new approach to empowering local communities to partner with developers in order to respond to local challenges. CBAs can be used to address economic development and growth, but also poverty reduction and environmental sustainability in neighbourhoods across Canada.

The bill seeks to maximize the value of every public dollar invested in our communities. By requesting applicants to submit an assessment on community benefits, the minister can make a much more informed decision around community priorities.

Under this new system, the government can weigh the additional benefits each contractor will bring to the community, including additional information such as jobs created during and after, environmental benefit, and costs. The minister can move forward with greater confidence that money is being invested wisely in our communities.

The economic gains of procurement are clear. Public Services and Procurement Canada manages close to \$15 billion in procurement on behalf of federal departments and agencies. These procurements multiply economic opportunities and community benefits across the country through direct and indirect effects.

Crucially, close to 40% of our overall procurement business goes to small and medium-size enterprises, which are almost always local. Using figures from the last three years, 98% of construction contracts awarded in Ontario went to suppliers based in Ontario.

This policy will also incentivize private construction firms to think more broadly about their role in communities, and is in practise already with many municipalities. This approach offers an excellent opportunity for businesses to increase the scope of their supply to include a focus on social innovation and environmental benefit. In addition, the platform includes a proposal for federal infrastructure projects as a means to ensure development of opportunities for veterans and other under-represented groups.

Bill C-344 also offers an opportunity for Public Services and Procurement Canada to engage in work with municipalities. No one appreciates and understands the diverse and unique needs of communities better than the people who live there.

Canadians require a procurement process that works for them and reflects their values. Alongside transparency and accountability, procurement can fulfill economic, social, and environmental benefits. Bill C-344 is an opportunity for Canadians to get the most out of their tax dollars, ensuring tax dollars work for them.

I again thank the member for Brampton Centre for bringing forward the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Guelph will have six minutes remaining in his time for his remarks when the House next returns to debate on the question.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1205)

[English]

CHANGES TO THE STANDING ORDERS

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.) moved:

That the Standing Orders of the House of Commons be amended as follows:

1. That the following section be added after Standing Order 32. (6):

“(7) Not later than twenty sitting days after the beginning of the second or subsequent session of a Parliament, a Minister of the Crown shall lay upon the Table a document outlining the reasons for the latest prorogation. This document shall be deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs immediately after it is presented in the House.”

2. That the following new Standing Order be added after Standing Order 69.

“69.1(1) In the case where a government bill seeks to repeal, amend or enact more than one act, and where there is not a common element connecting the various provisions or where unrelated matters are linked, the Speaker shall have the power to divide the questions, for the purposes of voting, on the motion for second reading and reference to a committee and the motion for third reading and passage of the bill. The Speaker shall have the power to combine clauses of the bill thematically and to put the aforementioned questions on each of these groups of clauses separately, provided that there will be a single debate at each stage.

“69.1(2) The present Standing Order shall not apply if the bill has as its main purpose the implementation of a budget and contains only provisions that were announced in the budget presentation or in the documents tabled during the budget presentation.”

3. That Standing Order 81 be amended as follows:

(a) by replacing each occurrence of the words “interim supply” in sections (3) and (17), and in paragraph (14)(a), with the following: “interim estimates”;

Government Orders

(b) by replacing the initial text in section (4) with the following: “(4) The main estimates to cover a given fiscal year for every department of government shall be deemed referred to standing committees on or before April 16 of that fiscal year. Each such committee shall consider and shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the same back to the House not later than June 10 of that fiscal year, provided that:”

(c) by replacing in paragraphs (4)(a) and (b),

I. the words “May 1” with the words “May 8”;

II. each occurrence of the words “May 31” with the words “June 10”;

(d) by replacing paragraph (4)(c) with the following: “(c) on the third sitting day preceding the final allotted day, at not later than the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, the said committee shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the main estimates for the said department or agency; and”;

(e) in section (5)

I. by adding after the word “immediately” the word “after”;

II. by replacing the word “censé” in the French version with the word “réputé”;

(f) by adding a new section (6) to read as follows: “(6) Interim estimates shall be deemed referred to a standing committee or committees immediately after they are presented in the House. Each such committee shall consider and shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the same back to the House not later than three sitting days before the final sitting or the last allotted day in the period ending not later than March 26.”; and

(g) by deleting the words “or interim supply” in section (21).

4. That the following sections be added after Standing Order 104.(4):

“(5) In addition to the members named pursuant to section (1) of this Standing Order, the Chief Government Whip may, at any time, file with the clerk of any standing, special or legislative committee a notification indicating that one or more Parliamentary Secretaries shall serve as non-voting members of the committee. The Parliamentary Secretaries shall have all of the rights and privileges of a committee member, but may not vote or move any motion, nor be part of any quorum.

(6)(a) A Minister of the Crown cannot be appointed to or cannot act as a substitute on any standing, legislative or special committee.

(b) A Parliamentary Secretary cannot be appointed to any standing, legislative or special committee, except as provided for in section (5) of this Standing Order.”

5. That the following subsections be added after Standing Order 114.(2)(d):

“(e) In relation to Parliamentary Secretaries named pursuant to Standing Order 104(5), the Chief Government Whip may effect a substitution of one Parliamentary Secretary for another by filing notice thereof with the clerk of the committee and such a substitution shall be effective immediately when it is received by the clerk of the committee.

(f) A Parliamentary Secretary named as a non-voting member of a committee pursuant to Standing Order 104(5) shall not be eligible to act as a substitute for a member of that committee.”

6. That Standing Order 114.(3) be replaced with the following:

“(3) Changes in the membership of any legislative committee shall be effective immediately after notification thereof, signed by the Chief Whip of any recognized party, has been filed with the clerk of the committee. Substitutions may be made in the same manner prescribed in section (2) of this Standing Order.”

7. That Standing Order 116 be replaced with the following:

“(1) In a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

(2)(a) Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee may not bring a debate to an end while there are members present who still wish to participate. A decision of the Chair in this regard may not be subject to an appeal to the committee.

(b) A violation of paragraph (a) of this section may be brought to the attention of the Speaker by any Member and the Speaker shall have the power to rule on the matter. If, in the opinion of the Speaker, such violation has occurred, the Speaker may order that all subsequent proceedings in relation to the said violation be nullified.”

That Standing Order 81 as amended take effect on September 18, 2017, and remain in effect for the duration of the current Parliament;

That the other Standing Orders as amended take effect on September 18, 2017;

Government Orders

That the Clerk of the House be authorized to make any required editorial and consequential alterations to the Standing Orders, including to the marginal notes; and

That the Clerk of the House be instructed to print a revised edition of the Standing Orders of the House.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about our government's commitment to strengthen and improve Parliament. We believe Canadians cherish the House of Commons, the very heart of our democracy. We believe that what happens in this place, how we conduct ourselves, how we debate legislation, and how we hold the government to account is central to our country's democratic health.

● (1210)

The people who sent us here deserve to know we are doing our best to serve in their best interest and to make them proud of the work we are doing on behalf of them. They deserve to know that as their elected representatives, we are working together to put our country's interests first. Simply put, our constituents should be assured that we will all fight together for their interests. Those debates can often be drawn along clear and robust partisan lines, and that is good. This is part of what creates good public policy.

At the same time, it is crucial that all of us find ways to collectively maintain and strengthen the political institution where we debate our differences, our perspectives, and most important, the voices of our constituents. Indeed, the rules and conventions that govern this place date back through generations of our predecessors, and we have all done well by them.

However, there can always be improvements. We can always modernize. We can always do better. Today, it is time to do just that. We are here to debate our government's proposed motion to reform and modernize the Standing Orders in several key areas.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

In this discussion, it is important to emphasize the reasons why these changes are needed and how they can serve to strengthen the House of Commons over the decades to come.

It is also important to emphasize how attached we are to implementing new practices, such as the Prime Minister's Question Period, which will contribute to making our government and future governments more accountable to Canadians.

[*English*]

As background, I would like to remind colleagues of some of the steps that have brought us here today.

Two years ago, as Canadians were preparing to cast their ballot in the general election, the Liberal Party released its campaign platform. That platform promised real change and pledged to give Canadians a voice in Ottawa.

The platform stated:

For Parliament to work best, its members must be free to do what they have been elected to do: represent their communities and hold the government to account. Government must always stay focused on serving Canadians and solving their problems.

The following are among the specific promises that were made in the platform that we committed to: introduce a prime minister's

question period to improve the level of direct accountability; end the improper use of prorogation and omnibus bills; provide better parliamentary oversight of taxpayer dollars; and, strengthen parliamentary committees so that parliamentary secretaries do not have a vote on committee.

On election day in October 2015, Canadians made their decision on the type of government and Parliament they wanted in Ottawa. The result was clear: Canadians elected a government with a mandate to strengthen Parliament. The Prime Minister is committed to making that happen.

It is important to note the instructions he has given me in my mandate letter, which states:

As Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, your overarching goal will be to make Parliament relevant again and to ensure that Canadians once again have a real voice in Ottawa. Parliamentarians must have the information and the freedom to do their most important jobs: represent their constituents and hold the government to account. It is your job to help empower all Members of Parliament to fulfill these essential responsibilities.

[*Translation*]

Before going any further, I would like to insist on the fact that that is our main goal. Our intention is to give powers to members on both sides of the House. We want to give them the tools they need to be able to do the work for which they were elected. We want to ensure that the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers are more accountable to the House.

[*English*]

As I have often stated in this place, I welcome the views of my colleagues. I have engaged in good-faith discussions with my Conservative and NDP counterparts about our approach to the specific reforms we have put forward. These were helpful discussions. Indeed, throughout both the public discourse we witnessed this spring, and more recently in my conversations with my counterparts, I listened carefully. Now, Canadians expect us to act. We have a plan on how to strengthen Parliament. It is reasonable and it is based on our mandate from Canadians.

First, let me address the changes to the Standing Orders in four areas.

Government Orders

With respect to the prorogation of Parliament, which signifies the end of a session and can occur with justification during a mandate, there have been times in the past that governments have improperly prorogued early to avoid politically difficult situations. If that happens again in future, Canadians deserve a formal explanation in Parliament. Under the change, the government must table a document outlining the reasons for prorogation within 20 sitting days of the next session of Parliament. That document must justify the government's decision to end a parliamentary session. The document would be deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This change will build accountability into Parliament.

Our government is committed to ending the improper use of omnibus legislation. I am not speaking here of responsibly drafted budget implementation bills that contain changes stemming directly from the budget; rather, I am referring to what should happen when a government introduces a non-budget omnibus bill that contains entirely separate and unrelated themes. We want to ensure that MPs are not faced with the dilemma of how to vote on a bill that is most supportable but contains a totally unrelated clause, a poison pill, that they find objectionable. We want flexibility for MPs in these instances. Under the proposed change, the Speaker would have the authority to divide bills for the purpose of voting for second reading, third reading, and passage of a bill. The Speaker would also be authorized to group a bill thematically. There would be a single debate at each stage, and members would then be able to vote on parts of a bill separately.

With respect to estimates, members of Parliament are responsible for keeping track of how the government intends to spend the public's money, yet the financial accounting system they are currently expected to use is inconsistent and incomplete. We need a better way. We want to better align the budget and estimates process so that the data means something and is truly relevant and timely for colleagues, resulting in better informed decision-making.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

Our motion proposes changing the date on which the main estimates are tabled from March 1 to April 16. The date on which the estimates should be sent to the House by the relevant committee would move from May 31 to June 10. Pushing back the dates will ensure that the estimates more appropriately reflect the budget and will allow members to conduct a more detailed review. This will allow Parliament to provide better oversight.

[*English*]

Our government believes strongly that committees provide the backbone of much of the work that is done in Parliament. It is there that MPs can do some of their best work, scrutinizing legislation and hearing the views of experts, stakeholders, and Canadians at large. Indeed, it is at the committee stage where proposed legislation can be improved and members from all parties can constructively work together toward that end.

We believe there is a role for parliamentary secretaries to be members of committees. As link to ministers, they can provide insight and great assistance to other committee members as well. Under our proposed changes, parliamentary secretaries can be

committee members, but they cannot vote or move a motion, nor can they be part of the count for quorum or act as a substitute for a member on a committee on which they have been named a non-voting member.

That is a summary of the changes to the Standing Orders that we propose.

I would like now to turn my attention to another matter that we also believe is important: the Prime Minister's question period, PMQP. Our Prime Minister is firmly committed to being more accessible to all members of Parliament in question period. This is why, this spring, he took the historic step of initiating a prime minister's question period, in which he answered all of the questions asked on Wednesdays. This special question period is in addition to the other days of the week when he attends the regular question period to answer questions with his cabinet ministers.

So far, our Prime Minister has attended six special question periods on Wednesdays, answering a total of 233 questions from members of Parliament on those six days alone. We have shown it can be done. We now have made it our practice that when the Prime Minister is here on Wednesday, he takes all the questions, and we will continue that practice. Let me make one thing clear. The Prime Minister's question period is here to stay under this government. Just as it became the convention and not something codified in the Standing Orders in the United Kingdom, it is our endeavour that it will become the convention here.

In closing, I invite members to support our proposals for strengthening Parliament. We promised Canadians two year ago that we would make these changes. Canadians gave us a mandate to do so. They gave us a mandate to act. It is time to work together and make our Parliament stronger.

● (1225)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I have been working together on a number of issues over the last number of months and although I disagree with the process and much of what she has done, I recognize the hard work that she has put into all of this. My question for the House leader is very broad. I will talk a little later about the specific proposals.

Government Orders

The Conservatives' biggest criticism was the way the government handled this and said that, whether there was a consensus or not, it would be making these changes. My question for the government House leader is very simple. When things change and the Conservatives are on that side and the Liberals are on this side, does she wish to be treated in the way that she treated the opposition? Does she think that the Conservatives would then have the ability to make major changes to the Standing Orders and ram them through the House of Commons, whether the opposition specifically likes it or not? Does she wish to be treated in the way she treated us?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I have said always, my door is open. Hindsight is always 20/20. Were there ways that we could improve the process if all members could agree to work better together? We have demonstrated that we are able to work together. We have been having good, tough conversations and I can assure all colleagues that I will continue to keep my door open. I will continue to advance the mandate Canadians gave us about working better together. That is something I heard on doorsteps. I believe all members can work better together and will definitely play my part in helping to make that happen.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the government House leader for her speech and acknowledge the hard work that she has provided in recent months. In her opening remarks, she talked of “working together to put our country's interests first”, and in her mandate letter there is also talk of working “with Opposition House Leaders”. Therefore, is the government House leader now committed to only changing Standing Orders in the future, the very rules of how our democracy functions, where there is multi-party support for the changes proposed; or does she still think that her government can amend these rules unilaterally?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I also would like to thank the member for his hard work. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we have been working very closely together and we have had some fruitful, meaningful conversations and I sincerely appreciate that. I know we can work better in this place. It will always be my endeavour to have those tough conversations and to keep my door open. I do believe that we can always find a way to represent our constituents. The perspectives that every member brings and that every role in this place brings are essential to the democratic process and to the health of our democracy. That is why I will always endeavour to work better together.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, there are many comments I would wish to make and, as the government House leader knows, I have submitted some substantial proposals, including for prorogation. We test the confidence of the House in an actual vote in the House. I am glad to see prorogation dealt with. The approach that was advanced in my paper came not from me but from some of Canada's leading political scientists including Hugo Cyr, Peter Russell, and so on. I also proposed on omnibus bills—and it is an improvement to be able to split them—for studying them, not merely for voting on them. Is there an opportunity in the debate we are going to have in the next several days only, to actually achieve consensus from all sides of this House on the changes that are now proposed?

●(1230)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member responded to the discussion paper that I had shared in good faith and endeavoured to have some tough conversations on it. I appreciate the work she has done on this file. We have also made certain that the member will be able to participate in this meaningful debate because we know that she shares perspectives and points of view that need to be raised in this place.

I believe that there is still much work to do. This is a step. These are the commitments we made to Canadians that we are advancing on. I believe the procedure and House affairs committee can continue this good work. I know it has started some work and it can broaden that scope, should the members of that committee wish to do so.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister and I both served as staff in previous parliaments and I think we have all been around to see some of the very interesting things that have happened here over the years. When I read this motion, I see a whole lot of things that would have helped us when we were in opposition and not a lot that would help us here in government. I wonder if the minister would agree with that assessment: this would help this place function by empowering opposition parties to do their jobs better.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the opposition plays an essential role and the government has a responsibility to act on the mandate that it is given. This is about empowering all members of Parliament. Every member of Parliament was elected by his or her constituents to ensure that their voices were heard in this place. That is the vision behind everything I do. I believe that we need to ensure that the voices of our constituents, of Canadians, are heard in this place. It is something we committed to in the election campaign. It is something that Canadians received very well. This place belongs to the people, so I believe the motion before us would strengthen every member of Parliament through the important work that members are elected to do.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two brief questions for the government House leader.

First, Bill C-49 is a wide-ranging transportation modernization act, so called. Bill C-51 is a very wide-ranging Criminal Code change. I wonder if the government House leader thinks either, or both, of these constitutes improper uses of omnibus legislation.

Government Orders

Second, I want to ask about the powers given to parliamentary secretaries because now, the way the Standing Order change is set up, a committee could theoretically bar members of Parliament who are not members of the committee from attending in camera meetings. That would mean they would have additional members of the government who are parliamentary secretaries who are able to remain in the room, but they would have other members of Parliament who might be interested in the discussion who cannot be in the room. Does the government House leader see a problem with that? Would the government House leader agree that any member of Parliament who wants to listen in to an in camera discussion if he or she is an elected member of Parliament, regardless of whether the member is a parliamentary secretary, should be able to do so?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, these are exactly the kinds of discussions and conversations I was hoping to have when I released the discussion paper. I do believe that there are perspectives and opinions that members have to share, and can share, that would benefit this place and the work that all members of Parliament do.

In regard to the legislation the member is referring to, that is why we are saying we should provide the ability to the Speaker in this chamber to divide legislation by votes, so that members will not have to determine their support of legislation in regard to an item that is not along the same themes. We know that we need to improve the way we function in this place, and that is the endeavour and will always be the goal.

When it comes to parliamentary secretaries, we know that the parliamentary secretaries have access to a lot of information. We have seen committees do the important work that they are doing. If a parliamentary secretary can provide insight and information to members of a committee to help them do their work, I believe that is essential to the process. That is why this is a step in the right direction.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the government House leader for her speech, but it was certainly dripping with irony.

She said that omnibus legislation would never deal with unrelated themes, yet she had us in the House last week on a justice omnibus bill. I guess she is saying that witchcraft and duelling are related to some of the criminal procedure changes that were in that omnibus legislation.

The government House leader's deputy, the member for Winnipeg North, called omnibus legislation in the last Parliament "an assault on the House of Commons", much like the omnibus bills we have been seeing in this House. The assault in the last few weeks has been with time allocation, omnibus legislation, and now the speech on Standing Orders today.

My question for the the government House leader is quite simple. Given the platitudes in elements of her speech, does she have any personal regret for the time allocation and omnibus legislation we have been debating and voting on in the last few weeks, based on where she wants to see the Standing Orders go?

• (1235)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we were elected to this place to do important work. All members of Parliament have a responsibility to ensure they are representing their constituents.

It is important. The commitments we made to Canadians in our election platform came from when this party was in the third official status of this place. We know that under the previous Stephen Harper Conservative government there was an abuse of omnibus legislation. We know that we need to improve the way we can work together so that members of Parliament can actually advance the voices of their constituents, and that is the goal here.

We have had good faith conversation amongst the recognized parties to ensure those voices are heard and to ensure that we have a motion before us that we can work together to improve. I will continue keeping my door open and having those tough conversations to really modernize this place, and to ensure members are able to represent their constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. opposition House leader, I will just make just a clarification.

Earlier when I was presenting today's motion to the House, the hon. member for St. Catharines and others were prompting that I perhaps dispense with the reading of all of the details. In fact, for clarification purposes, I could have accepted that suggestion in the case of such a lengthy motion. The motion is actually printed, of course, in the Order Paper for today, which can be made reference to. We could have proceeded in the usual pace to seek the consent of the House to dispense with the motion. Perhaps I should have done that. Nonetheless, it is a matter of history now.

Resuming debate.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a long road we have travelled to get here. The process leading us to today's motion has been a long and very frustrating struggle. It was a struggle where the opposition was forced to mitigate the excesses of a careless and arrogant government, a government devoid of any appreciation for what Parliament actually does, a government that insulted the House and dismissed the role of members who sit in opposition to it.

The process has been a sham from the beginning, despite the assertions that we have been hearing about a conversation, a dialogue, and working better together. Over the weeks and months of question period, the House has heard the full word salad from the government trying to defend and excuse its approach to Parliament, a bunch of jargon and buzzwords tossed together with very little substance and very little weight. Given the way the Prime Minister has handled this whole issue and refused for months to acknowledge the need for all-party support, Conservatives will be voting against the motion.

Government Orders

Let me take a few moments to review just how we managed to get here. On March 10, a Friday afternoon, just before we started our March constituency week, the government House leader posted on her website a so-called discussion paper. The House will recall that this Liberal discussion paper proposed, among other things, to reduce the opportunity for members to hold the government to account by eliminating Friday sittings, automatically time-allocating all bills, preventing the opposition from triggering debates on committee reports, and bringing sharp closure changes to committee. It was a shocking set of ideas to think about. Since it was less than a year since we had witnessed the Motion No. 6 fiasco, it was sadly par for the course with the government. The primary driving force for the Prime Minister has been to alter the balance between the opposition and the government by taking away the protections that the rules offer.

The Globe and Mail in an editorial at the time called out the Prime Minister on his ideas and I quote:

[The] government considers the opposition's limited arsenal to be "tactics which seek only to undermine and devalue the important work of Parliament," and which "sow dysfunction" and are not "rational" or "defensible," according to a discussion paper....

Those contentions are cynical bunk. The...government is hawking a utopian vision of Parliament, in which members from different parties politely discuss the government's proposed legislation on a schedule set by mutual agreement, and there are cheers all around when the House enacts laws that are a perfect reflection of the selfless compromises agreed to in a collegial fashion on committees and in the House....

There are just sunny ways passing beneath crisp rainbows.

They are sunny ways indeed. Had this discussion paper simply been just that when it was published, it would have been read, critiqued, and actually discussed with the flaws being pointed out and the interesting ideas build upon. However, that is not at all what happened.

Later that afternoon, the government House leader's colleague gave notice of motion at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to have the discussion paper studied, with everything wrapped up and recommendations made by June 2. Had the motion at committee simply been a proposal to add the discussion paper to its study of the Standing Orders, it would have been a natural idea and hard to object to. However, that is not what happened. The writing was on the wall. All of the ideas in the discussion paper, which coincidentally all were to the benefit of the Prime Minister, would be rammed through.

Let us fast forward to the procedural and House affairs committee on March 21. The Liberals wanted to pass their motion right away. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston offered an amendment to observe the longstanding tradition around here of using all-party consensus to change our rules. The Liberals, to their credit, quickly signalled their disagreement with that perfectly reasonable amendment.

We were faced with a completely transparent plan from the Liberals to ram these awful ideas through the House. We simply would not allow this to happen. As a result, we had to stop this reckless Liberal power grab from getting rammed through, so we used one of the very few tools available to opposition parties, the one that the Liberals actually had wanted to remove, and that is the ability to filibuster. Over some six weeks with more than 80 hours of

committee meetings, opposition MPs led the fight against the Liberal discussion paper.

• (1240)

I have to give credit to the three Conservative MPs who are members of that committee, the hon. members for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, Banff—Airdrie, and Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock. However, it was not just them; this really was a team effort, and 29 Conservative members of Parliament participated at that committee.

In parallel to the committee proceedings, the NDP House leader and I offered a constructive alternative to the government. We suggested that the House set up a special committee with one member from each party, chaired by our impartial Deputy Speaker, to work on a consensus basis in reviewing our procedures and proposing improvements.

What we proposed was hardly revolutionary. Pierre Trudeau's government set up the Lefebvre committee, which recommended several changes to the Standing Orders, such as bringing in the first time limits to bell ringing, which were adopted unanimously.

Brian Mulroney's government set up the McGrath committee. That group tabled three reports, all adopted unanimously, on a whole range of topics, such as giving our standing committees permanent mandates to study topics on their own initiative.

Under Jean Chrétien, a special committee on the modernization and improvement of the procedures of the House of Commons was created. That committee codified the pattern of goodwill to its rules with an express requirement for reports to be adopted unanimously. Far from that being a veto—and remember that this was back in the days of five recognized parties—the committee managed to adopt six reports.

Most recently, Stephen Harper's government followed the tradition of the unanimity approach, not bringing in permanent procedural amendments with out all-party support.

Those governments proved that reforming Parliament can be done with a co-operative approach. The results were substantive, and they significantly strengthened the role members play in this place.

Indeed, I know the procedure and House affairs committee would have been up to that task. From following their debates, and from joining them for a night, I know that the members from all parties handled the task in front of them with civility and good cheer. They would have handled such a review in a professional and capable fashion.

Sadly, it was quite clear that the Liberals on the committee were under firm instructions from the Prime Minister's Office not to let their members' own better judgment carry the day. Indeed, far from being co-operative and far from her repeated claim to have an open door, the government House leader left the other House leaders hanging. For weeks on end, our letter to her went unanswered.

Government Orders

In addition to a committee filibuster and good faith proposals from the opposition parties, here in the chamber the opposition parties used many of the tools available to us to register our unhappiness and our frustration. The Liberal government desperately tried to get back on track, even shutting down a privilege debate and preventing it from coming to a vote. The hon. member for Perth—Wellington called out the government on this, and the Chair ruled that what the Liberal government had done was entirely without precedent. The Speaker wisely and bravely ruled, allowing the privilege debate to start anew.

Finally, admitting that the Prime Minister was staring at the risk of a total paralysis of his parliamentary agenda, the government House leader finally answered the letter that the hon. member for Victoria and I had sent her. In that letter she indicated that the Liberals were backing away from their discussion paper, but would be pressing ahead regardless of the opposition parties' thoughts with items referenced in the Liberal election platform.

The opposition cannot claim complete credit for the Liberal backdown. I suspect the Liberal House leader may have been under considerable pressure from her own caucus colleagues. Though caucus meetings are confidential, I believe that we witnessed the tip of the iceberg when the hon. member for Malpeque, a veteran of this House, offered this in debate on April 11:

...this place is called the House of Commons for a reason. It is not the House of cabinet or the House of PMO. Protecting the rights of members in this place, whether it is the opposition members in terms of the stance they are taking, is also protecting the rights of the other members here who are not members of cabinet or the government. We talk about government as if this whole side is the government. The government is the executive branch. We do need to protect these rights.

Here we stand today debating government Motion No. 18.

● (1245)

First let me talk about something that we all expected to be in this motion. The headline proposal in every Liberal statement this spring about the Standing Orders was that there was going to be a dedicated Prime Minister's question period. We heard a lot about that.

The Prime Minister was gung-ho and looking forward to having to show up to work for just 45 minutes every week. The Prime Minister was going to show us just how well he could memorize his lines and put on a Broadway-worthy performance with dramatic delivery. He may even have put his hand on his heart a time or two.

We all saw how that experiment unfolded. The Prime Minister quickly saw that his glib platitudes did not give satisfying answers on the concerns of Canadians, the problems facing our economy, or his ethical lapses. It quickly became crystal clear to everyone that the Prime Minister failed to perform and bombed terribly.

Remember the Wednesday when the Prime Minister was asked 18 times if he had met with the Ethics Commissioner? That was May 10.

Although I cannot and I will not refer to the presence or absence of a member, I can say that the House did not hear another Wednesday answer from the Prime Minister until June 7.

John Ivison wrote just this past Thursday about the most recent Prime Minister's question period, noting that the Prime Minister“...

did not look like he was having fun Wednesday, when he was pummelled for the entire Question Period on topics ranging from the big issues of the day—Chinese takeovers, rising debt levels—to more arcane subjects like potentially illegal activity at Shared Services Canada and autism funding.”

It is obvious that Liberal bigwigs decided that their leader's performance was actually a liability to the Liberal Party. His performance in question period specifically was a liability to the Liberal Party. If anything, the Liberals' last-minute withdrawal of this proposal only highlights the fact that the government's approach to procedural reforms has been guided solely by Liberal partisan interests. They only want to do it if it is in their interest. That has been made very obvious by their rather rapid withdrawal of a Prime Minister's question period.

Of course, the Prime Minister's good friend, Gerry Butts, was on Twitter Friday claiming that there would never be standing order amendments to create a Prime Minister's question period. To further his alternative facts, the PMO principal secretary then claimed that the Standing Orders were entirely silent on question period. I guess he obviously had not read Standing Order 37, for example, with the big headline above it of “Oral Questions”.

Setting that aside, in her response to written Question No. 1022 tabled Friday afternoon, the government House leader said, “The motion will refer to the commitments made in the platform during the election in relation to...increasing accountability in question period.”

The House leader also testified on Thursday afternoon at the procedural and House affairs committee, where she again reiterated that the Prime Minister's question period would be in the motion. Just a few hours later, though, her words did not match up to her notice of motion, with the Prime Minister's question period being noticeably absent.

We can only conclude that this was a very hasty, last-minute change of heart from the Liberals, likely following last Wednesday's flop by the Prime Minister.

Now that I have spoken about what is not in this motion, let me turn to what actually is in government Motion No. 18.

On prorogation, the Liberals wanted to prevent governments from abusing this routine constitutional procedure. One way to do that is to promise not to abuse it and then follow through on that promise. That would be the good, old-fashioned approach of integrity.

Instead, the government proposes that after prorogation, the government would be obliged to table its reasons, or its excuses, when Parliament reconvenes. Basically, that means that from this time forward, governments can table the press release that it puts out when it announces prorogation. That is really all this change will do.

This amendment makes no sense. It is meaningless. The Prime Minister should be embarrassed to put it on the Standing Orders.

Government Orders

With respect to the Liberal pledge on omnibus bills, we see something even more ridiculous and absurd. The Liberal proposal to end omnibus abuse exempts budget bills, the very bills the Liberals used to complain about. When we look at Bill C-44, which just passed, we see that it is little wonder the Liberals are trying to have their cake and eat it too.

On the other hand, for the few bills the rule might possibly apply, really nothing will change at all. There will be a few extra votes in the House, but no more debate would be held.

●(1250)

The real concern is that the Prime Minister will become more aggressive with omnibus bills. Sheltering under this half-baked reform, omnibus bills will be encouraged. The Liberals can claim that they will be absolved of any fault, because they have changed the rules. This is absolute rubbish. It is not hard to imagine the Liberals taking us to a place where we will soon see things like a throne speech implementation act, with everything thrown into one bill and just a lot of votes to follow. It is actually very worrisome.

However, we should not worry; they say there will be three votes instead of one.

In short, the proposals on prorogation and omnibus bills are so cynical that they are just jokes, plain and simple.

The next item is not as cynical, and it may even have some merit. However, to be successful, it requires the Liberal cabinet to follow through on a promise. Given their record on keeping promises, I have my doubts.

Without getting into a lot of technical detail, government Motion No. 18 tweaks a number of aspects about the scrutiny process for the main estimates. For Canadians not familiar with what the estimates are, they are the proposals that lead to Parliament's authorization for government spending.

The government wanted to achieve a better alignment of the budget and the main estimates. As a matter of principle, Conservatives do not object to this idea. However, the challenge lies in implementation, especially the timing.

Essentially there are two ways to address the timing issues: budgets could be presented earlier or the estimates could be presented later. The government wants flexibility in when budgets are presented, given fluctuating events. That is fair enough, since the previous Conservative government also insisted on the same thing when similar proposals were floated by committee five years ago.

However, last fall the President of the Treasury Board published his own discussion paper on this very issue. He called for a permanent change to the Standing Orders that would reduce the three months currently available to study the main estimates down to 30 days. The Treasury Board president had been promoting this reform, effectively saying that it would give us great documents—so great, apparently, that there really would not need to be time for parliamentary oversight.

Well, hold on. While recognizing the merits of aligning budgets and estimates, the Conservative Party does not want to sacrifice the

time available for scrutiny of spending proposals, because we all know how much the Liberals love to spend.

Last fall the Liberals were quite itchy to get these changes through the government operations and estimates committee, but we managed to put the brakes on these hasty, bad changes. For that, I want to recognize the good work of our Treasury Board critic, the hon. member for Brantford—Brant, and his colleagues on that committee, the hon. members for Beauport—Limoilou and Edmon-ton West.

We were hardly doing this just be stubborn or obstructionist. Outside observers, including none other than our parliamentary budget officer, pointed out concerns with the government's optimistic plans. In November the parliamentary budget officer published a report explaining the promise of the President of the Treasury Board. The PBO had this to say:

With respect to delaying the main estimates, the Government indicates that the core impediment in aligning the budget and estimates arises from the Government's own sclerotic internal administrative processes, rather than parliamentary timelines.

He went on to say:

This example [of last year's supplementary estimates] shows that it is unlikely that delaying the release of the main estimates by eight weeks would provide full alignment with the budget.

His predecessor, Kevin Page, penned an op-ed in *The Globe and Mail*, which also poured cold water on the Liberal plan. Kevin Page said:

How does that improve financial control? ... If you start from the perspective of financial control, Parliament should see the fiscal plan...before April 1.

Therefore, this is not just us expressing concerns. There were a number of other esteemed individuals who expressed concern with the government's plan.

More recently, the PBO, in reviewing the spring supplementary estimates, offered this skeptical take, noting his analysis:

●(1255)

...demonstrates the [Treasury Board] Secretariat is further away from its goal in 2017-18, rather than closer to it. This raises a significant question of whether the Government's proposal to delay the main estimates would result in meaningful alignment with the budget.

Basically, the Liberal government was saying to trust them on improving the estimates and wanted Parliament to agree to this change up front, while the evidence of the government's ability to do its part was completely unconvincing.

By standing firm through tough negotiations over the winter and spring, Conservatives reined in these Liberal efforts to slash accountability.

The amendment set out in government Motion No. 18 is now a two-year experiment, providing two months of committee study, twice the amount that the Treasury Board president had originally proposed. By insisting on a sunset clause for this change, Conservatives have ensured we can take an evidence-based decision after the 2019 election on whether the information made available to parliamentarians truly does improve leading to a reasonable trade-off with losing a month of scrutiny.

Government Orders

The ball is now in the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board president's court. Given the government's record, I am not holding my breath.

Finally, there is the amendment that will prevent ministers from sitting on committees. However, it will allow parliamentary secretaries to be ex officio members of committees, with all privileges except the ability to vote or to constitute quorum. They may participate at in camera meetings, question witnesses, and travel. Parliamentary secretaries will maintain practically every tool, except an actual vote, to shape and steer committee work.

Liberal parliamentary secretaries have continued to attend committees, and in some cases strive to shape the committee's work and decisions. This proposal would only further entrench their ability to do this, while claiming to honour platform commitments. How very clever.

If the Prime Minister has concluded that parliamentary secretaries are important to committee work, the Liberals should just admit that and assign them Liberal seats at committees.

The Liberal caucus has dozens of backbenchers with multiple committee assignments. This arrangement may work in the current majority context, but in a minority situation it could become quite an unsustainable burden on any government backbench when 70 or so office-holders would go without any committee assignments and 50 to 80 MPs would have to cover 24 standing committees, plus two joint committees and any special committees. I do not know if the government has thought this through, especially if it does find itself in a minority situation at some point.

A similar arrangement whereby parliamentary secretaries could not sit on committees that were related to their department was implemented in 1986, but it was later scrapped in 1991. We should not be surprised to see another U-turn in the years ahead on this particular change.

As I said in my opening remarks, this has been a long road that we have travelled down. At the beginning, I was not sure whether the Liberal House leader's approach to this whole issue was aggressively ambitious or just very naive, but over the subsequent months, the answer has become increasingly clear.

Shortly after the parliamentary battle launched in March, Andrew Coyne wrote a piece entitled, "Renewed attempt to rewrite House rules confirms Liberals are not to be trusted".

The article stated:

The [first] 18 months of the...government have been an education in cynicism. Every time you think you have plumbed the depths, every time you believe you have pierced the many veils of their duplicity, you are delighted to discover still another con wrapped inside the last—usually delivered by some smiling minister tweeting variations on "Better is Always Possible" and "Diversity is Our Strength."

Later the article says:

The latest chance to refresh our acquaintance with how deeply cynical the [Prime Minister's] people are—not have become: are—is the clutch of grubby expedites the government is now trying to stuff down the opposition's throats, in the name, prettily, of "parliamentary reform." Scholars of the [Prime Minister's] style will recognize the expression "reform," like "merit-based appointments" and "evidence-based policy," as a tell that some kind of humbug is afoot, and this is no exception....

● (1300)

We had an early foretaste of this with the infamous Motion Six... That alone ought to have signalled how sincere [the Prime Minister]'s frequent protests of his devotion to democratic accountability are: as calculated, as fake—and as useful!—as his feminism.

Well now the Liberals are back, with a new, more attack-proof House Leader...

That brings me to the current government House leader.

I truly believe the hon. member for Waterloo is very well-intentioned, but she has been set by the Prime Minister for failure, as a rookie parliamentarian, in taking on the important role as House leader and all that it entails, while at the same time picking this fight.

Veteran parliamentary observer Chantal Hébert recently penned her observations on a pattern of, as she said, "Rookie ministers turned into cannon fodder". I will read from her recent column. It is extremely relevant and a very clear example. She has articulated very clearly what we are seeing the Prime Minister do with his rookie MPs, specifically women MPs, sadly. The article stated:

[The hon. member for Waterloo] is the first woman to occupy this strategic government position [House leader]. She also brings to the role less hands-on experience in the Commons than any of her predecessors.

To be able to read the mood of the House is an essential skill for one in [her] position. It is also a skill usually acquired over time.

As parliamentary neophyte, [she] would have had her hands full just keeping the government's legislative agenda on track. Yet, shortly after her appointment she was tasked with implementing a controversial set of parliamentary reforms. Included in the government's unilateral wish list were measures that would have curtailed some of the few procedural tools at the disposal of an opposition minority.

[The government House leader] might as well have set out for a stroll across a minefield. She pressed on with the plan until a predictable procedural war threatened to bring the House to a grinding halt. At that point she beat back in retreat — at cost to her credibility.

Even veteran Liberal Warren Kinsella reached this conclusion when he tweeted last week, saying that if she was forced to do yet another climb-down, her position would become untenable.

The passage from Chantal Hébert's column was about a broader point: the fact that our self-proclaimed feminist Prime Minister has put a number of earnest, well-intentioned, but inexperienced young female ministers into senior roles where they become political roadkill. As a female politician myself, it angers me when I see what the Prime Minister has done with his cabinet and those with immense professional potential. These are young people with huge potential in the Liberal caucus, and they are being put in these positions just to benefit his cynical feminist brand.

Basically, we are seeing some Liberal MPs being prematurely promoted into roles and responsibilities ahead of having the necessary experience to assume such weighty offices and then being asked to do the impossible for the Prime Minister. Some would call this the "glass cliff".

Government Orders

I recognize that some of this could be inevitable when a party goes from being a third party straight into government. However, we have seen a pattern with the Prime Minister, which has been made much worse by a prime minister who is far more concerned with snappy sound bites and click-bait pictures than actually doing his own members right and putting them in positions where they have experience and are not doomed to fail. He simply does not have his eye on competent management and professional development within his own government.

As Ms. Hébert suggested, these young rookie ministers could well have become formidable forces in Canadian politics. I wish them well in their future, I honestly do. They would have been formidable forces in Canadian politics if they had a chance to mature in their career paths, but instead they have seen their potential sacrificed for the sake of some re-tweets and trending hashtags.

Speaking personally, I know the value of taking one step at a time on a career path. When I was first elected, I did a stint on the backbench and then I got to chair a committee. After that, I worked for a while as a parliamentary secretary and then was promoted into the ministry. Today, I find myself the opposition House leader, a role I am very privileged to hold.

● (1305)

Even though I am learning new things every day, it is not basic principles I am learning. I have had the benefit of adding my lessons to a base of experience and knowledge that I have acquired over almost nine years. Regrettably, for the hon. member for Waterloo, I do not think she has enjoyed the same benefit of incremental growth and development. However, the fault for that lies not at her feet but with the Prime Minister.

What is the lesson to take out of this whole episode from the March discussion paper through to today's government motion?

In a column entitled, "Liberals forced to swallow humble pie — again — on parliamentary rule changes", John Ivison stated, "the Liberals have learned the hard way that the rules governing this most precious of institutions can only be amended by consensus, not by parliamentary cosh."

We have long said that the rules of the House belong to all members from all corners of the House. Changes should enjoy consensus support before being implemented. The Liberals have learned this the hard way. Ideas for discussion and debate are to be welcomed. A prescriptive list of proposals strapped to a rocket for rapid implementation rightly rouses suspicions.

However, the government continually demonstrates its contempt for this institution and its history. Most recently, in his proposed nominee for Clerk of the House of Commons, we once again saw the Prime Minister dismiss the consultation process and bypass the established non-partisan professional development practice for career advancement with our procedural experts. There are some very serious and valid concerns with respect to how the nomination of the Clerk has come about.

Prime ministers, even those with majority governments, should not pick a fight with the House of Commons in a bald-faced power grab to neuter what tools this House has. After all, the core

constitutional role of the House of Commons is not to pass bills but to hold the government to account.

Barely a year in office, the Liberals found this reality to be a pesky inconvenience. They tried to eliminate this, to remove the distraction from a government built on platitudes and selfies. The government has created a distraction, falsely called our calls for consensus to be a demand for a veto. It was not a demand for a veto; it was our right. There is a significant gulf between a demand for a veto and a consensus.

Negotiations and horse-trading inevitably lead to a result where one has to give up something to gain something. However, that is not how the government chose to approach the Standing Orders. It should not have ended up this way. It chose to provoke a procedural war in an effort to get its own way. As in every case throughout the centuries when power-hungry kings and governments sought to curb Parliament's powers, the House of Commons fought back. Just as in the past, the elected House won. We are grateful for that, and will keep fighting the government and doing our job.

● (1310)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I can assure the opposition House leader that roadkill I am not. I am very proud of our Prime Minister and the confidence he has shown in the women on this side of the House. It is a confidence and commitment that is long overdue. It has gone a long way to demonstrate to the world what women have to offer, how their input is valued and how it will bring us to a far better place.

However, my question is not with respect to the opposition House leader's comments. I want to focus on the Prime Minister's question period.

We know the Prime Minister is participating in this question period in addition to the regular question period in the House. To date, the Prime Minister has answered 233 questions in the prime minister-specific question period in addition to the regular questions.

I want to correct the record. The opposition House leader had indicated we were backing off of this. We are not backing off. In fact, the government House leader has said that this government is committed to carrying this through. Therefore, I first want to correct the record that this government will carry on with this commitment because we believe it brings greater accountability.

Does the opposition House leader not believe that all future prime ministers should commit to keeping this practice?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, first I want to address the comments of my hon. colleague in regard to the positions that inexperienced ministers have been put in by the Prime Minister.

Nobody is talking about whether it is a good idea to put women in cabinet positions. We agree with that. However, we need to put the very best people in cabinet positions, and many times those very best people are women.

Government Orders

My colleague needs to ask herself this question, and maybe ask the former Minister of Democratic Institutions, the current Minister of Status of Women, or maybe ask the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who had to defend the minister's appointment of official languages commissioner, and the government House leader: why does the Prime Minister put inexperienced female politicians in positions he knows will be very difficult?

He has given them some of the most difficult things to do without a path to success. It is clear the Prime Minister is putting them in front of him. He is okay sacrificing them so he can get the glory he wants. As women, we need to stand up to that kind of thing, telling him that is all show and not substance. It is very clear.

On the other issue around question period, it has been really interesting to hear the Liberals talk on and on about putting this in their Standing Orders changes, and then it is absent. Maybe they want to stop talking about prime minister's question period. It is not in this motion.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of how the hon. opposition House leader and I have worked together over the last few months in order to look after the rights of parliamentarians against the current government's power grab.

When the government House leader introduced her so-called discussion paper and then forced the Liberals at the procedure and House affairs committee to try to include it in their Standing Orders review, members will recall that the committee and House almost came to a grinding halt, slowing down the government's already lethargic legislative pace.

Would the hon. member agree that we likely would not have had to sit until midnight for the last four weeks if the government had simply used a consensus basis for proceeding to change the Standing Orders?

• (1315)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my hon. colleague, the NDP House leader, for the way we have been able to work together.

The fact that the Conservatives and the New Democrats, who disagree on pretty well everything, agreed on this showed how important it was that they could not ram changes through. It really showed the substance of our argument.

In regard to the long hours we have been sitting, it is clear how the Liberals have mismanaged the House of Commons and the very few bills it is trying to get through. The fact is that even a week and a half ago, while we were sitting until midnight, while they were using time allocation, the Liberals brought two motions before the House that we had to debate. They really had no lasting impact, whether we voted on them or not. There was one on the Paris agreement and one on foreign policy. It just had to do with the Liberals trying to find more ways to pat themselves on the back, and maybe try to divide this caucus, which did not work.

The fact that the Liberals had time to play those kinds of games and engage in that kind of self-indulgence really shows their motivation. At the end of the day, the Prime Minister does not respect this place. He does not think it is necessary. He does not want to be here. He treats this place like a nuisance, and that was clear in

how he had his House leader try to carry out the agenda of the Liberals.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria and the opposition House leader have talked a great deal about the need for consensus to change the Standing Orders. However, only six days ago, the NDP opposition day motion sought to change the Standing Orders on a majority vote.

In the last Parliament, Motion No. 489, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, did change the Standing Orders of the House on about 58% of the vote.

There is a bit of sanctimony and hypocrisy in what the opposition members say on an ongoing basis. I was at PROC for almost the entire 80 hours of that rather long meeting on March 21. What happened was we brought forward a motion to have a discussion on the Standing Orders. It was a request for discussion. There were no changes to the Standing Orders. The motion did not even refer to the minister's letter. It was a request for an ongoing conversation with the opposition. I was hoping we would all have this conversation. If the opposition members did not like what came out of it, they could have filibustered at that point and stopped the report. It still would not have come back to the House.

Why are opposition members not interested in having any kind of actual meaningful discussion on changing the rules of this place?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, it is clear from what that member asked that the Liberals have not learned one thing from this entire episode.

We have given numerous examples where previous governments under Liberals and Conservatives did have discussions around the Standing Orders. No substantive changes to the Standing Orders can be made without a full consensus. That is a fact.

The fact that the member brought up the NDP opposition day motion is proof of our point. The only way the NDP motion would have passed in the House is if that party would have been able to build a consensus and been able to persuade opposition members that its proposal was a good one. It was not able to do that and the motion did not pass. That is the way it should be. What the Liberals did was the opposite. They are able to pass anything they want because they have a majority and they do not have to care about building a consensus.

The member's logic is flawed and his illogic proves our point, that being that we should only change the Standing Orders with a consensus. That means make the argument, persuade everybody that it is not partisan, and the change will happen.

We are seeing that everything the Liberals want to do is fully for their partisan benefit, and that is another reason they did not want to build a consensus.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the points that have been raised, that changing our Standing Orders does require consensus.

Government Orders

It may not be fair to ask the opposition House leader about what was done in the Harper government, but for MPs in positions such as my own of being in a party with fewer than 12 here, instead of changing the Standing Orders, which would not be done with consensus, the then government under Stephen Harper used the device of writing a motion and then forcing every committee to pass it to restrict the rights of members in smaller parties to make amendments at report stage.

The Liberals then used the exact same device, thus changing the legislative process in the House through the parliamentary alchemy of forcing committees to pass motions. Committee by committee, identical motions first in a majority Conservative Parliament and then in a majority Liberal Parliament have the effect of changing the way legislation goes through the House without consensus.

I wonder if the member has any comments on that.

• (1320)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I do recall quite fondly the 26 hours of voting that ensued at that particular time. I do recall the end result of what the member is referring to.

Obviously there are a number of tools that both the government and the opposition have to achieve the results that they want. The opposition has to do what it can to fight against what the government wants and the government will be held to account for what it does.

In this case, our initial approach to the government was for it to put a group together, whether a group like the Jean Chrétien model, the Pierre Trudeau model, or the Brian Mulroney model. If we could have at least started with that, we could have had more input even from other parties in the House, but we could not get to that base. We were stalled at every turn.

We are now at a place where we can somewhat agree on what we are going to disagree on. However, make no mistake: the government is doing this the wrong way. This is not the right process. This is not a success for the government.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say from the outset that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly. I ought to say at the outset as well that it is with regret that the NDP opposes Motion No. 18. Had there been a better way, we would not necessarily have been here. This motion represents the final act of a failed attempt by the government House leader to unilaterally ram through changes that would overhaul rules that govern democracy and the House of Commons, and the government failed.

The Liberals would have done things that would have consolidated the power of the executive branch of government. I want to outline, therefore, how we got to this point. I do concede that many of the more odious things that the government wanted to slip in under the guise of a discussion paper never found a way into this motion, mercifully. Still, the government's wish list is mostly about trying to make the House function in a way that is simply more convenient to the government. That is not necessarily how democracy was supposed to work.

There are five things that this motion would do. I will address them in a bit of time, but they are the prorogation issue, omnibus bills, the timing of estimates, parliamentary secretaries at committee,

and the use of filibusters at committee. I will examine them later, but first we need to talk about how we got here.

The Liberals promised to “Change the House Standing Orders to end the improper use of omnibus bills and prorogation”. That was in the mandate letter for the hon. government House leader. Instead, their motion simply would legitimize omnibus bills. It would do nothing as well to hinder the improper use of prorogation, which the Stephen Harper government used in 2008 and 2009. It would simply regularize that. Therefore, the cynicism in the standing order reform is really quite breathtaking. They also promised to make committees independent by removing parliamentary secretaries, but the motion would do nothing of the sort to prevent them from being there, from managing the agenda in the interests of their ministers, or from ensuring their majority membership voted the right way.

In 2015, the campaign platform of the Liberals made a series of promises about parliamentary reform. It said this, “A Liberal government will restore Parliament as a place where accountable people, with real mandates, do serious work on behalf of Canadians.” One of the things they said they would do would be to change the rules so members and parliamentary secretaries may not be, or stand for, voting members on committees. This gives, I think, the clear impression that parliamentary secretaries and ministers would not be on committees at all; not so fast, as we will see.

They also said they “will ensure that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is truly independent...properly funded, and accountable only—and directly—to Parliament”. The current parliamentary budget officer and the former PBO, Kevin Page, have just criticized the changes that the government has made in giving new responsibilities to the parliamentary budget officer, fearing that they would have to have their work plan approved by the Speakers of the House and Senate before proceeding, hardly something that enhances the independence the Liberals promised us.

The Liberals said they would end abuse of prorogation and omnibus bills. That was included, as I said, in the mandate letter to the government House leader. She was to “Work with the President of the Treasury Board to ensure accounting consistency between the Estimates and the Public Accounts”—I will have more to say about that in a moment—and, my favourite, “Work with Opposition House Leaders to examine ways to make the House of Commons more family-friendly for Members of Parliament.” That has certainly gone by the wayside, as we see a four-week marathon session to midnight, which is hardly friendly to young families.

Government Orders

In March 2017, as the hon. opposition House leader has outlined, there was a so-called discussion paper where the government House leader laid out the Liberals' plan to overhaul the rules of the House, clearly rejecting the traditional approach of requiring all-party agreement for major changes to the way this place runs. The Liberals simply did not seek all-party consensus. They simply thought they could ram through their changes; again, many of which were simply to make the life of a government easier. They did not succeed, I am happy to say.

● (1325)

They promised to eliminate Friday sittings. They have resiled from that commitment dramatically. Allowing ministers to vote without interrupting cabinet meetings is no longer there. Adding sitting weeks in January, June, and September is out.

Have the House sit longer on any given day, eliminate the summer and Christmas adjournment date at the government's discretion, remove tools of the opposition from routine proceedings, replace the tool of time allocation with a more powerful tool called "programming", and so forth; a lot of those things did not make it to this part of our parliamentary process. Now we have a motion with merely five things.

There was also something called a "prime minister's question period" that did not make it. As of Friday it was in, but it is no longer there. I will ask Canadians to draw their own conclusions as to why. We are supposed to assume that it will still be part of their practice. I do not know what we are to take from that.

We saw a filibuster at PROC. We saw issues as we used our procedural playbook in this place to disrupt the government's agenda, to get Canadians' attention. The media and stakeholders rose to the occasion. We simply said as opposition that we would not stand for unilateral changes to this place. I am proud that both opposition parties worked together to find common ground in protecting parliamentary rights.

However, I want to give credit where credit is due. It was not just Conservatives and NDP, there were well-meaning, experienced Liberal members of Parliament who also understood how dangerous the government's course of action was. I refer, for example, to the hon. member for Malpeque, who on April 17 said this:

The reality is there's not enough getting done in the House. I've been a long-term member and I strongly believe that you have to have at least consensus from the main parties to change the rules of the House.

We also heard from many Liberal backbenchers, encouraging us not to give up, understanding we were dealing with their rights as parliamentarians as well.

Eventually, the government has backed down and now we have what can only be described as pretty thin gruel before us. The government has been very ineffective with its legislative productivity. The Liberal government has passed half the bills that were passed by this time in the Harper government's mandate. The Liberals have introduced 56 bills into either the House or Senate, and now have passed 25 since they came to power. Notwithstanding that there have been a lot of time allocation motions in the last while, I think most Canadians will agree that had they worked with other

sides of the House, we would have had a more productive Parliament.

I would like to address the five things, very briefly. On prorogation, within 20 days of the new session following a prorogation, the government would have to submit a report to the House explaining the reasons why it prorogued. What will that achieve? It will achieve virtually nothing. It will not stop the misuse of prorogation that we saw under Mr. Harper. In fact, it would simply allow rubber-stamping of prorogation. How cynical is that?

On omnibus bills, it was Mr. Harper who traditionally used the budgets for his omnibus bills, so it is not about a budget implementation act. It is about others. The Standing Order change would simply allow the Speaker to have the power to divide omnibus bills for the purpose of voting "where there is not a common element connecting the various provisions". We saw the 300-page budget implementation bill that is before Parliament making all sorts of changes, which this would not affect.

On filibusters, in the interest of time, I cannot say much more, except to say that was a positive change that came out of eleventh-hour negotiations.

On the budget and main estimates, the Treasury Board Secretariat could have time to have the main estimates reflect what is in the budget. That is a good thing. However, our concern as opposition is that this proposal merely reduces the amount of time the opposition and stakeholders would have to examine the main estimates.

The NDP must, regretfully, vote against the motion. We hope the government will never again attempt to unilaterally change the rules that govern all of us parliamentarians as we go about our duties in this place.

● (1330)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend from Victoria for his contribution to the debate today on Motion No.18. Let me start with an expression of regret that the opposition parties cannot move forward in support of Motion No. 18, in spite of the fact that if we think about it, what really drove our attempt to bring the discussion paper forward, and many of the ideas for changing the Standing Orders, were the excesses of the previous government in terms of its overstep of its powers and our reaction to it, which ultimately made its way into our campaign platform for 2015.

As the official opposition House leader and the third party House leader were giving their narratives of the proposed changes to the Standing Orders, it seemed that the real reason they are opposed to them is that they object to the entire process. From my perspective, the substantive changes we are trying to advance actually strengthen the opposition's capacity to keep the government to account, as opposed to weakening it.

Does my friend actually believe that we are driven by some capricious, underhanded attempt to make this place less accountable?

Government Orders

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, we are utterly opposed to the process that brought us here, but that would be to not understand or grasp what I am saying about the content of what was left on the table after the cutting room floor. On prorogation and omnibus bills, the two things the Liberals bragged about as commitments they would make in their mandate letter and during the campaign, all they have done is regularize them. The Liberals will not change the content. They are simply saying, “Hey, we have a prorogation.” What does that do in terms of enhancing accountability?

There are things such as the estimates process, which, with work, can be improved, but to take away a lot of the time we have to do our jobs as parliamentarians is a pretty weak start. The content as well as the process are at issue.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government blames the previous government as the reason for the changes, yet when we look at the types of changes it is proposing, it is making things not better but substantially worse for a member of Parliament.

My NDP colleague was sitting in those meetings and listening to the members from the government talk about the changes and why they wanted to make the changes. Does he have confidence that the Liberals understand what the changes actually mean?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure they do, because they seem to drip of cynicism and hypocrisy. To simply talk about prorogation but do nothing about it suggests that they really do not understand the abuses the Harper government brought to that process. Regarding omnibus bills, the big one was Bill C-38, the famous Harper budget implementation bill that included everything under the sun. This motion would not touch those budget measures; it would, rather, touch other measures.

Again, one wonders if they are cynical or are simply trying to check a box on some campaign program and say that they delivered. Meanwhile, the Liberals talk about things today that are not even there, such as the Prime Minister's question period, yet we are still supposed to take it on faith that they really mean it. I find it confusing.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if my colleague has reached the same conclusion as we have in the Bloc Québécois.

Not all committees that are struck are standing committees. For example, the NDP previously set up a committee on pay equity and a sub-committee on the appointment of senior public servants. Independent members are always omitted from these committees, however. Exceptionally, and at the request of the Bloc Québécois, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform included a member from both the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party. Reading the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders, I can see that Standing Order 116 would be replaced and that the Standing Orders shall apply in a standing, special or legislative committee. That means no special committees on which members of the Bloc or the Green Party could sit.

Has my colleague reached the same conclusion?

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I agree that there have been some positive changes in this Parliament, such as the example the member gave of the electoral reform committee, which is something I was very proud of. I do not see why we cannot bring other committees in that would be more representative and have more independents on them. Indeed, there are standing committees and there are standing committees. We would also have a committee of parliamentarians established, under Bill C-22, which is not even within the realm of the Standing Orders. It is entirely separate.

Parliament is an infinitely adaptable institution. We have shown that in the examples the member gave and with the committee of parliamentarians. I think we can do better if we work together, but that is not addressed in what is before us in the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing Motion No. 18. This is a motion in which we see the Liberals making some compromises after the fiasco that unfolded these last few months over their proposed changes to the rules and procedures of the House of Commons.

The government's efforts are doing nothing to improve things in Parliament or to increase government accountability, and neither are they solving the problematic use of omnibus bills and prorogation. However, those are the goals that the government set out with these changes.

Last Thursday, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was in appearance to testify on this very matter. During her testimony, she used an expression that I did not at all appreciate given what has transpired. She spoke of a lack of political will. I believe political will is necessary in order to adopt bold ideas and take risks. However, in order to do that and to hold the kinds of discussions the government claims to want to hold, we need a healthy process in which these bold ideas can be heard so that we may then show the political will to move ahead with this so-called modernization of Parliament, to use the terms used by the government.

The government's chosen approach to this issue is a product of its ultimate arrogance. The political will to discuss substantial issues was there. However, without a healthy process in which all voices can be heard, no progress can be made. Unfortunately, that is something the government still does not understand.

Listening to the questions that have been asked and the comments that were made since debate started this morning, it is clear that the government still does not understand.

Government Orders

I do not want to digress too long, because I want to talk about the substantial issues surrounding the motion, but I do want to touch on the question asked by the member for Laurentides—Labelle, for example, who spoke of our search for consensus. The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley and the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, among others, worked hard for the entire NDP opposition day to try to end partisan appointments. They also worked with the government the entire day to try to come up with an amendment that might allow for consensus, to make the necessary concessions to get the government on board. However, the government voted against that amendment and then voted against the motion.

The member for Laurentides—Labelle accuses us of hypocrisy on this matter. I consider that unparliamentary language. He needs to look at himself in the mirror and acknowledge what has been going on for the past few months. This is not a new problem. We have been dealing with this problem since last year with the infamous Motion No. 6, which sought to remove some of the opposition's powers. When I think about this government's attempts to improve parliamentary life for all members, the expression "do as I say, not as I do" comes to mind.

Let us turn to the substantive issues in Motion No. 18, such as the item on omnibus bills. Instead of putting an end to the practice, to this scourge, which has a negative impact on parliamentary life and prevents members from doing a good job and properly analyzing some extremely important legislative measures, the government is normalizing and validating the use of omnibus bills.

We need only recall what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said in committee last week on the importance of themes. The problem with themes is that one can always find a way to justify that something relates to the budget. That is exactly what the previous government did with its excessive use of omnibus bills.

Bill C-44, the bill to implement certain provisions of the budget, contains legislative measures to create the infrastructure bank. This involves a fundamental change in how our infrastructure is funded. This has caused great concern among parliamentarians, civil society, and Canadians.

• (1340)

On Friday, I saw Senator Pratte on television saying that he was in favour of the infrastructure bank but did not understand why the government is bound and determined to include it in this bill rather than carrying out an appropriately thorough review of such an important measure.

Even senators who support the idea of the bank do not like its being in the omnibus bill, proof that the government crossed a line. The same thing could easily happen again, even with the changes proposed in Motion No. 18. The Liberal Party would have us believe that these measures will enable parliamentarians to study important legislative initiatives like this one, but what the motion really does is officially normalize the government's use of omnibus bills.

What is even worse is that, by making these measures part of the House rules, nobody will even be able to criticize them. Now, at least, we can say that it is an inappropriate use of legislative tools,

but once it is in the rules, any government, current or future, will be able to say that this tactic is fine because it is in the rules.

Let us talk about prorogation. I remember in 2008 when Mr. Harper announced that he was proroguing Parliament. He was trying to get out of a situation where the opposition parties had the audacious political will to form a new government to replace the Conservative government. Let us not forget what happened when Parliament resumed after prorogation. Perhaps that is why the Liberals are not so keen to talk about prorogation and making real changes, because it seemed to have served them well in 2009. They came back and suddenly had nothing more to say about it. They were quite pleased to have Mr. Harper stay in power. However, I do not want to dwell on the past. I want to talk about the current government.

The government is proposing to table a report in the House of Commons outlining its reasons for using prorogation. It essentially boils down to a press release that would be tabled in the House. If the government does not see that any MP or its communications officer could quite easily come up with a justification for using prorogation, then it is dreaming in technicolour.

In that respect, I asked the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs whether there would at least be a vote on this report, as provided for in the Standing Orders of the House in the case of motions to concur in committee reports. She could not even say. She simply said that the use of this mechanism would ensure accountability. That does not mean much. The government is not even considering the possibility of allowing parliamentarians to vote on this report.

Once again, after promising to correct a mechanism that the previous government abused, the new government is simply giving us a fine press release. That is not showing respect for Parliament, quite the opposite.

The government also wants to reduce the time provided for the consideration of the estimates in committee from three months to eight weeks. Once again, I am wondering how giving parliamentarians less time to do this work shows respect for them and the job they do.

In closing, I would like to propose an amendment, but first I would like to say that nothing has been learned with regard to the parliamentary secretaries in committee. If the government really believes that preventing the parliamentary secretaries from voting or moving motions is sufficient to convince us that the PMO and cabinet do not have any power in committee, then it is dreaming in technicolour, because all that the parliamentary secretaries have to do is whisper their instructions to the Liberal members.

That is not the real change the Liberals promised. On the contrary, pretending that this is a real change demonstrates a greater lack of respect for Parliament than simply abusing the mechanisms. At least with the previous government, we knew exactly what it wanted from us. Now, we are getting stabbed in the back. That is not the way to show real respect for parliamentarians.

Government Orders

● (1345)

[English]

In conclusion, I move, seconded by the member for Victoria:

That the motion be amended in part 2 by deleting all the words in section 69.1(1) after the words “divide the” and substituting the following:

“bill thematically into separate and distinct bills, each of which shall be deemed to have been read a first time and shall be ordered to be printed. The order for second reading for the newly divided bill shall provide for referral to a committee or committees determined in consultation with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, listening to what the government House leader had to say when introducing the debate, it should be very clear.

The Prime Minister made a commitment to Canadians. What we are debating today is the fulfillment of that commitment. I understand and I can appreciate that the opposition has fought long and hard for all sorts of things. I will not go into the details of those things. The reality is that today's debate is all about a commitment that was made by the Prime Minister, and that commitment is being fulfilled by this government.

My question to the members opposite is quite simple. There was a legitimate discussion paper. There was a legitimate outreach from the government House leader. Now I am hearing opposition members saying that maybe we should have the PM question period in the House. We have a Prime Minister who is committed to it. He is fulfilling his commitments.

For whatever reason, the combined opposition feels it has to criticize for the sake of criticism, as if that is the only role it has to play on the issue of Standing Orders.

My question for the member is this. Would he not at least agree that it is important that the resolution brought forward today as part of the Prime Minister's commitment to Canadians should be respected and advanced?

● (1350)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, it is a good thing the Liberals are referring to it as the Prime Minister's question period, because it certainly is not the Prime Minister's answer period, as we have seen up until this point.

If this is really following up on the Liberal Party's commitments from the last election, what are the Liberals actually doing with this motion? They are normalizing and formalizing the use of omnibus budget bills. Liberals are basically saying that they are going to prorogue and we should not worry because they will table a press release in the House of Commons, but they will not let us vote on it. Liberals are saying we should not worry about the parliamentary secretaries, because they will not vote or table motions in committee. The title parliamentary secretary means exactly that, and is a minister going to sit in on a committee? They represent ministers. Does the government House leader think that is appropriate?

I sat in this place in the last Parliament when that member lit his hair on fire, day in and day out, at the abuses we saw by the previous government. At least I knew where Conservatives stood. I thought I knew where that member stood, but I guess I was wrong.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite rich to hear the government attest its good intentions of how interested it is in following through on the Liberal platform.

How about the Liberals balance the budget four years into their mandate, as they promised? That would be something that is very important to Canadians. There are so many platform commitments that Liberals are completely ignoring.

I want to ask my friend a specific question about the role of parliamentary secretaries on committee. The government has said it was going to take parliamentary secretaries off committees, and now, it is trying to put them back on, not in place of a Liberal member but actually to effectively increase the number of government members present on committees.

This is a real concern for me, because we have seen cases of the government appearing not to want to have members of the opposition present at in camera discussions if those members are not formally members of the committee. This opens the door for the government to effectively exclude all other members of Parliament from being at in camera discussions, except the ones who are members of the committee or parliamentary secretaries. It is a way for the government to grow its contingent on committees while leaving parliamentary secretaries involved.

I wonder if the member could comment on how it strengthens committees if the government has through this—I want to say “back door”, but it is actually pretty explicit what it is doing—tried to increase its representation on committees.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, on the preamble to my colleague's question, if the Liberals defended their other promises with as much vigour as they have wanted to defend this one, maybe it would have gotten something like electoral reform done.

That being said, I want to address the question of parliamentary secretaries on committee. Some members may not know that it actually requires unanimous consent to have a member who is not a formal member of the committee at these in camera proceedings. Right now that means parliamentary secretaries.

What the government is doing here is taking away the opposition's ability to say no at in camera proceedings. The government House leader, when I asked her this question at PROC last week, gave us an answer that said it was in case members need information. Pardon me, but if I need information from the minister, we are going to bring the minister in front of committee. I do not need someone who is sitting there listening in on the proceedings representing the minister to give that information.

Moreover, we have those opportunities to question ministers and parliamentary secretaries. Committee work also means studies, clause-by-clause consideration, and things like that. Quite frankly, whether members can vote, or pass a motion, their mere presence has an impact on members, whether or not we wish to recognize it. It is too bad the government does not.

Statements by Members

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate with the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, I will let her know that there are only five minutes remaining in the time before the House proceeds to statements by members. She will have her remaining time when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to present the views of the Green Party on changes to the Standing Orders, as proposed in this place earlier this morning by the government House leader.

I first want to notify the House that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Montcalm, who like me represents a political party with status before Elections Canada, with votes in this place and equal status to any other MP. However, as a Bloc Québécois member, he like me enjoys fewer rights because, historically, over a very long period of time, larger parties have worked to reduce the rights of members of parties who are not, at this point, in the big three. It is one of those areas that I wish we could revisit when we look at Standing Orders, because it is inherently anti-democratic that some members of Parliament, and therefore their constituents, have fewer rights than other members of Parliament.

I will mention parenthetically, because this is not the thrust of most of my remarks, that we are the only Parliament in the Commonwealth with this notion of two-tier members of Parliament. There are 650 members of the U.K. Parliament, and I have a lot of sympathy for my colleague the co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, Caroline Lucas, who serves in a Parliament of 650 members. However, there, the right and ability to perform functions in the House is not treated on a junior and senior basis as happens in this place, in a rather bizarre fashion when we take a long historical view of it.

We have certainly heard very good speeches so far this afternoon on the very key point before us, which is that we do not change the Standing Orders without political consensus among the parties in this place. Again, the bigger parties have exercised that without regard to those of us who represent parties. I am here not as an independent. The seating chart of the House of Commons makes it clear that I am here as a Green Party member of Parliament, but without the same rights as others. However, the reality is that the bigger parties reach consensus on changing the Standing Orders. That is the way it is usually done, and for good reason.

These traditions go back, in some cases, hundreds of years. It is terribly important that there not be unilateral changes made by the side of the House that has the most votes, because that would be a very perilous way forward. We are dealing with issues that are quite fundamental. This is an important and historic opportunity, for instance, to fix the rules around prorogation. We never had to have rules around prorogation because the glue that holds the Westminster parliamentary democracy together in Canada is a glue that is amorphous. It is not written down.

On the rules on prorogation, leading up to a confidence vote in this place, the NDP, Conservatives, and the Bloc decided to warn former prime minister the Right Hon. Paul Martin that his government would be brought down on November 28, 2005, a date of convenience that the three other parties decided upon to go to an election and bring down the government. It is important historically

to reflect back on the fact that the former prime minister, the Right Hon. Paul Martin, did not prorogue the House to avoid a confidence vote he knew he was about to lose. I imagine it did not even occur to him to do such a thing, because it simply was not done. It had not been done.

If we look at the Commonwealth, of all the nations that have prorogation, of all the prime ministers able to dissolve their parliaments, there were only two examples up to the date of 2008 when a Parliament had been prorogued to avoid political embarrassment. The other example, to our chagrin, was our first prime minister, the Right Hon. John A. Macdonald. Sir John A. Macdonald prorogued over something called the Pacific scandal and, when Parliament came back, he immediately adjourned and went to an election. It was not as egregious as what happened here. To close down Parliament to avoid a vote one knows one is going to lose is not something we needed to have rules about, because no previous prime minister in Canada had done it so abusively as former prime minister the Right Hon. Stephen Harper did.

This is an opportunity to right that wrong and make sure it never happens again, but the proposal from the hon. government House leader falls far short of that. It creates some rules that, after prorogation, Parliament resumes and then gets to talk about the reasons.

• (1355)

I will resume on this point tomorrow. I know everyone will be on the edge of their seats.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have five minutes remaining for her remarks and five minutes for questions and comments when the House next returns to debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

RAIF BADAWI

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a few days the House will adjourn for the summer. The members will head back to their ridings, back to their families, and the government will have passed its priorities, far from Quebec's priorities.

Do you know who is not a government priority? Do you know who will not be going back to his family this week? Raif Badawi, that is who.

In 2015, the Prime Minister said that Raif Badawi's case called for quick, responsible, and progressive action. For five years now the Saudi blogger has been in prison and could be lashed at any moment, and this government has been neither quick, responsible, progressive, nor effective. That is five years during which Canada has done nothing for him. Ottawa has abandoned Raif. Ottawa has abandoned Raif Badawi's family. That is this government's human rights record. Canada is selling tanks to a regime that crushes those who think. That is a real shame.

Statements by Members

● (1400)

[English]

DILALLO BURGER

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to talk to you about an institution that has been part of the riding of LaSalle—Émard—Verdun since 1929. Founded by Italian immigrants, Dilallo Burger became the first Italian restaurant chain in Montreal.

What differentiates Dilallo's from other restaurant chains is not only its famous upside-down buck burgers with peppers and cold cuts inside; rather, what makes Dilallo's special is the place that it has created in the community as a gathering place for close to 90 years.

By sponsoring local minor hockey teams, including one that included, at the same time, Mario Lemieux, Jean-Jacques Daigneault, and Marc Bergevin, they gave back. These three today, and others, including Ken Dryden, cannot resist Dilallo burgers.

[Translation]

Since the turn of the 20th century, Dilallo Burger has been a place that provided such a sense of community, that it seemed like the restaurant was an essential part of Ville-Émard. It has been a gathering place for the neighbourhood, the city, and several Montreal icons. This restaurant reflects the history of a family that settled in Canada and built a gathering place for generations. Congratulations.

* * *

[English]

CREDIT UNIONS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder how many members in this place do their banking with a credit union? I ask that question because, thanks to the big-government approach of the Liberals, fairly soon the answer will be zero. Any day now, archaic decades-old provisions of the out-of-date Bank Act will be enforced. That will mean that credit unions will no longer be able to use the words “bank”, “banking”, and “banker”. By extension, “online banking”, opening a “bank account”, and “bank with us” will basically become outlawed words, subject to big fines.

This needless word hunt will not only confuse middle-class consumers but will also impose yet another costly regulatory burden on Canada's credit unions, which have been particularly hard hit by the present Liberal government.

On behalf of the many credit unions in my riding and as a member of the all-party parliamentary credit union caucus, I would ask that the finance minister stop this needless action. One would think that the finance minister would better spend his time balancing the books.

* * *

FATHER'S DAY

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I began my day at the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation Walk with my family, raising money for cancer research, which is obviously very important to me.

We then proceeded to join with my mother and father to celebrate Father's Day at a Father's Day lunch. I know last week was a particularly momentous week for my father, given the journey that he has been through over the past few years.

I then went back home to prepare packing to come to Ottawa. I got a surprise from my three children as I was leaving. They presented me with a book called “How Much I Love You”, little notes that they basically wrote to me. However, I did not have a chance to read it until I arrived in Ottawa and got settled into my room. By the time I had finished reading it, I was an emotional, quivering mess, even though I am not normally an emotive person.

Let me say, on behalf of all fathers and their children, as their children are thinking about their fathers, they cherish the bonds between them for that incredible love.

A happy belated Father's Day to all fathers everywhere.

* * *

STELCO

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the sale of Stelco to Bedrock Industries has finally been approved. It is good news for Hamilton, and it is good news for the workers and some pensioners. The deal was not perfect. Health benefits for some pensioners will be funded at 70%, and workers' pensions depend on the sale of badly contaminated land.

Improving the deal would have required the involvement of the federal government, but the present government refused to get involved, despite repeated calls for help.

Marty Warren, Steelworkers District 6 director, summed it up by commenting on the Bedrock deal, “The federal government has not been engaged and has not offered any material support—neither in this case nor to help other communities across the country hurting from the steel crisis. Essar Steel Algoma...is operating under CCAA protection and other steelmakers have cut jobs and production, but our federal government is missing in action.”

The present government needs to stand up for the Canadian steel industry, workers, and pensioners. It needs to stop the double-talk and get to work.

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● (1405)

ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEMMICAN WAR

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, June 19, we mark the 201st anniversary of an event that took place in my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul, which shaped the future of Manitoba, Canada, and marked the birth of a new people.

After years of smouldering conflict, known as the Pemmican War, the victory at Frog Plain was a decisive conclusion for the indigenous people led by General Cuthbert Grant. At this battle, the Métis flag of infinity flew. Will Goodon of the Manitoba Métis Federation, says the battle started a “spark of consciousness” that marked the founding of the Métis nation.

Statements by Members

In this 150th year of Confederation, we should remember that what we now call Canada has always been home to many peoples.

The birth of the Métis nation marked something new and unique on this continent: the beginning of a proud history that we continue to write, even today.

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TURKEY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a long-standing relationship with Turkey, but as happens sometimes with relationships, we are now not as compatible as we used to be.

Turkey's government systematically violates the rights of its own people, ignores basic democratic norms, and has undermined international peace and security.

Irregularities plagued the last Turkish election and the recent referendum, a referendum that effectively put all power into one person's hands. Minorities have long-standing grievances, and their situation is getting worse. Turkey's decision to target Kurdish fighters who are themselves engaged against Daesh has negatively impacted our security. As well, is Russia really just a friend? I am beginning to wonder.

This is a clear low point in our relationship, but I still believe Turkey can change. It is time for Turkey to released imprisoned opposition politicians, restore genuine democracy, address electoral irregularities, recognize the full rights of minority communities, open the Turkish-Armenian border, recognize past acts of genocide, and restart the peace process.

Turkey, it is not me: it is you. If Turkey does not change, then western policy toward it will have to. Otherwise it will simply become somebody that we used to know.

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ATTACK IN LONDON

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night, on one of their holiest nights of the year, Muslim worshippers were attacked in London when a van drove into an unsuspecting crowd. We unequivocally condemn this terrorist attack and express our sympathy to those affected. People are scared and are looking for answers.

The rash of horrific attacks around the world is causing understandable anger and fear. All forms of extremism seek to turn us against each other. They aim to spread suspicion and hate. At times of adversity, it is important to recommit to our values of openness, equality, and the rule of law.

We need to double our resolve to promoting our values and common humanity. We are determined to hold terrorists accountable and to offer comfort to victims. At times of adversity, we must stand united against hate and violence.

[*Translation*]

FOREST FIRES IN PORTUGAL

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise in the House to express my most heartfelt condolences to the Portuguese people and the entire Portuguese-Canadian community, to which I belong, who suffer despite the distance.

Yesterday morning we woke up to a nightmarish tragedy. I can hardly imagine how devastated the families who lost 62 loved ones in that exceptionally fierce forest fire are feeling.

The European Union responded quickly with the moral and logistical support warranted by the situation. The diaspora is stepping up to provide support and assistance to all the villages that were destroyed.

I would ask my colleagues whose constituents include Portuguese-Canadians to reach out to them and offer some comfort.

Portugal will be a happy country once again, but for now, in the hearts of 16 million souls there is only fado and saudade.

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● (1410)

[*English*]

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year June 15 marks World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Elder abuse is an important human rights issue we all can bring awareness to, and help ensure that older generations have a right to live a life of dignity. This means a life free from all forms of abuse, including financial and physical abuse, as well as material exploitation, which can lead to significant emotional and mental suffering.

This issue is particularly close to my heart, and in my role as former Minister of State for Seniors, I am incredibly proud of the legislation my colleagues and I created to help end elder abuse.

I am disappointed by this current government's lack of focus on this issue, in particular their decision to abolish the Minister of State for Seniors portfolio. I hope to see all my colleagues and all Canadians fight to end this devastating form of abuse.

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FOREST FIRES IN PORTUGAL

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with a heavy heart, Canadians' and over 400,000 Portuguese Canadians' thoughts are with the families and friends of those affected by the deadly forest fires that have struck several parts of Portugal. We express our condolences to those who have lost loved ones.

Statements by Members

Devastating fires affecting the forests around Pedrógão, an area close to where I was born and have family, 120 kilometres north of Lisbon, have caused over 60 deaths and many injuries.

We thank our EU friends, and especially France, Spain, and Italy, for their firefighting assistance to the Portuguese authorities and people of Portugal at this time of need.

We commend the bravery of the firefighters and emergency services on the scene risking their own lives to save others.

Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa said, “The dimensions of this fire have caused a human tragedy beyond any in Portugal’s recent memory.”

[Member spoke in Portuguese as follows]

Para Portugal, dos seus compatriotas no Canada, o nosso amor e simpatias.

[English]

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the standing committee that assisted in drafting Bill C-6, I am honoured to rise today to celebrate the recent changes to our immigration system. The passage of this important legislation represents not only the realization of another pivotal Liberal campaign promise, but also reaffirms the highest ideals of Canadian identity and inclusive citizenship.

As the member of Parliament for one of Canada’s most multicultural ridings, I am proud to represent a government that fully appreciates that our diversity is a source of great pride. Furthermore, as an immigrant to this country myself, I found the previous government’s unjust, two-tiered citizenship model to be disgraceful and abhorrent.

By contrast, Bill C-6 repudiates the previous government’s cynical politics of division and once again upholds our noble calling that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, irrespective of where one is born.

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SIMON IBELL

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to pay tribute to Mr. Simon Ibell of British Columbia, who unfortunately passed away on May 26 at the age of 39.

When Simon was two years old, he was diagnosed with Hunter’s syndrome, a rare metabolic disorder that can cause potentially fatal organ damage. Despite doctors who claimed Simon would not see his fifth birthday, he lived a full and adventurous life.

Simon loved sports, and through sports, he advocated for people with rare illnesses. In 2003, he was named the Canadian Spirit of Sport Story of the Year for having biked 500 kilometres over 10 days on Vancouver Island and raising \$250,000 for MPS diseases.

Simon was a hero to those who are fighting rare illnesses and was an inspiration to everyone who was lucky enough to meet him.

I thank Mr. Ibell for his dedication to his cause. His legacy will carry on.

* * *

HELMUT KOHL

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, former German chancellor Helmut Kohl passed away at the age of 87. A household name during my childhood, he appeared regularly on the television sets of my parents and grandparents and shaped my early views of politics.

Chancellor Kohl was a stalwart champion of European integration and played a pivotal role in the reunification of Germany. He saw German unity as an inseparable element of a strong, stable, and prosperous Europe.

Kohl’s chancellorship spanned over 16 years, to this day the longest tenure of the post-war chancellors.

As one of eight German-born members who have ever had the privilege of sitting in this chamber, let me put my sentiments into the words of the poet Goethe:

[Member spoke in German as follows]

So Ehre denn, wem Ehre gebührt!

[English]

Therefore honour ... to whom honour is due.

I would ask all members to join me today in honouring former chancellor Helmut Kohl, a remarkable man and unequivocally a titan of European history.

* * *

● (1415)

NORTHWESTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Northwestern British Columbia have a proud tradition of hard work and self-reliance. They do not expect a lot from the government in Ottawa, other than a fair share and a Prime Minister willing to fight on their behalf.

When it comes to salmon and softwood lumber, even those modest expectations are not being met. The lumber industry has lost 150 mills and more than 30,000 jobs in just over a decade. It might lose another 15,000 jobs threatened by Donald Trump’s illegal tariffs. One small mill in Moricetown that employs 60 people has a bill from Trump for almost \$400,000.

When it comes to wild salmon, the picture is even more disturbing. The DFO has announced total closures on sockeye on the once abundant Skeena River. Years of neglect and cuts to funding have hurt our wild fishery.

Our communities have a plan to help out both the fishing and forestry sectors. We just need a government in Ottawa that is as hard-working and determined as the people of British Columbia's northwest.

The only question is this: will the government answer the call?

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week a Saskatchewan court ruled that Onion Lake Cree Nation must publish its financial information in accordance with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. The case was filed by Charmaine Stick, a courageous band member from Onion Lake. The minister's excuses for not enforcing financial transparency have never held water. One of her feeble reasons was that publishing the books would hurt the band's economic interests. However, the judge said otherwise. He stated:

There is no evidence before me as to the political or economic reasons why Onion Lake has refused to provide and post specified information. There is, for example, no evidence that Onion Lake's commercial interests would be negatively [impacted]....

The Conservatives will continue urging the Liberals to reverse their irresponsible decision to gut the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. No other band member should have to go to court for access to basic information.

I congratulate Charmaine. This is an important victory for band members across Canada.

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[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government promised a historic infrastructure investment plan. We have kept that promise by announcing more than 3,000 projects across the country.

Thanks to the leadership of my Quebec colleagues, we have announced 256 projects in Quebec worth over \$1.2 billion in federal funding, and that is in addition to \$1.3 billion for the REM, Montreal's electric rail network. This funding will provide flexible financing for projects that matter to our communities.

Money has been stagnating in Ottawa for years, but we have accelerated funding for the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the Place des Canotiers in Quebec City.

We will soon be announcing details about federal funding for public transit projects.

I am proud of everything our government has accomplished in Quebec. We are making wise, ambitious investments to build strong, sustainable, inclusive communities.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister announced during the election campaign that he would run small deficits of \$10 billion a year. At the current rate, the deficits will be \$25 billion a year. Initially, that was supposed to be for only two years, but now we are told that it will be for an indefinite period.

The Prime Minister is showing yet again that he is utterly incapable of managing taxpayers' money responsibly, and it is our children and grandchildren who will pay the price.

My question is simple. Can the Prime Minister tell Canadians, once and for all, when we will return to a balanced budget?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, Canadians had a very simple choice to make. Two parties wanted to make cuts to balance the budget at all costs, while we proposed investing in our communities, in growing the middle class, in science and technology research, and in the economic growth that Canadians needed after 10 years of mismanagement under that opposition party.

The fact is that we are investing in our future together, just as we promised Canadians we would do.

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● (1420)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, senators are calling for an independent review of the infrastructure bank. Members on this side of the House are calling for the same. Every expert who has studied this infrastructure bank is concerned about the risks and fears that taxpayers will ultimately have to pay for this bank.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide and the bank is as white as snow, then why is he afraid to have it thoroughly reviewed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about this infrastructure bank for years. It was one of our core election promises.

We know that we need to invest in infrastructure. After a decade under the previous government, we have made record investments of up to \$180 billion.

However, we also have to be innovative. That is why we are setting up this infrastructure bank, in order to build more infrastructure, whether for public transit, roads, or ports, things that Canadians need to create economic growth.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are calling on the Prime Minister to tell us when we will return to a balanced budget and he has nothing intelligent to say to us.

Oral Questions

He is asking taxpayers to sign a \$35-billion cheque for the infrastructure bank. It makes no sense. The Liberals are irresponsible and improvising across the board with taxpayers' money.

When will the Prime Minister respect this institution and allow us to take a more thorough look at this bank?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members across the way are proving once again that they do not understand how the Canadian economy works or what Canadians need.

Canadians need investment in infrastructure for things like public transit, affordable housing, and green infrastructure. For 10 years, the former government of the members across the way under-invested in our communities. We know that we have to make immediate and innovative investments, and that is exactly what we are doing for Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's proposed \$35-billion slush fund, also known as the Liberal infrastructure bank, is a disaster in the making. Even worse, we have learned, according to what the finance minister said last week, that the slush fund will not be run by Canadians.

Can the Prime Minister please explain why he will be appointing foreigners, who do not have Canada's best interests in mind, to the board of the Liberal infrastructure bank?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that we need investments in public transit. We need investments in social infrastructure. We need investments in green infrastructure to grow our communities, to grow our economy, and to create good jobs for the middle class today and for our children and grandchildren tomorrow. That is the vision of our government. This is what we put forward in the election campaign, and this is what we continue to work on.

We know that global investment can lead to better outcomes for Canadians. That is what we are focusing on drawing in.

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FINANCE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's refusal to answer that question shows why this infrastructure bank is a complete disaster.

Over the weekend, when asked a direct question, the Prime Minister refused to say when, if ever, he plans on balancing the budget. Given that our children and our grandchildren will be the ones stuck paying off his excessive spending habits and his multi-billion-dollar tab, they deserve an honest answer to a simple question.

In what year does the Prime Minister plan on balancing the budget? Will it be the year that pigs fly or the year that hell freezes over?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard all these arguments before. They were the core of the member opposite's re-election campaign. It was the core of the Conservative platform in the 2015 election, a platform soundly rejected by Canadians, because it focused on balancing the budget at

all costs through cuts to services and investments for Canadians. We made a commitment to invest in a brighter future through investing in infrastructure for Canadians and by putting more money in the pockets of the middle class by raising taxes on the wealthiest one per cent, all things those members stood against.

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● (1425)

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Quebec will be in Washington today to talk about the NAFTA negotiations, and many Quebec mayors have already done likewise. Elected officials in Quebec no longer have any confidence in the federal government to conduct these negotiations.

I do not blame them after the government's failure to properly address the softwood lumber and diafiltered milk issues. Unlike those of the federal government, Quebec's priorities are clear: protect good jobs, protect supply management, and resolve the softwood lumber issue.

When will the government tell us what its priorities are for the renegotiation of NAFTA?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my friend Philippe Couillard, the Premier of Quebec, who, like all of the other provincial premiers, has committed to working with the American government.

We emphasized how important it is for all levels of government to work together to make the United States understand that Canadians stand united, that we are concerned about its approach, and that we are prepared to strongly defend Canada's interests. That is what we are all going to do, and I commend Premier Couillard for his initiative today in Washington.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister needs to stop repeating his talking points and reassure Canadians once and for all.

[*English*]

The Liberals cannot continue to hold Canadians in the dark when it comes to the renegotiation of NAFTA. Workers throughout the country are quickly losing confidence in the Liberal government and its ability to negotiate a good trade deal in their interest. In less than a month, the U.S. will reveal its final priorities, and still, deafening silence from the government side.

Canadians deserve a government that will stand up and fight for their jobs, so when will the government release its plans on the renegotiation of NAFTA?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we very much look forward to sitting down with the American side after August 18, when the Americans have permission to sit down and start negotiating. Until then, we have made it very clear that our priorities are defending Canada's interests. Whether it be in softwood, whether it be in auto, or whether it be in dairy and supply management, we will always stand up and defend Canada's interests. We will not, however, talk in great detail about our negotiation strategy. Canadians know we will defend their interests. We will continue to fight hard for Canadian jobs and for growth for the middle class, because that is what Canadians expect of us.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is fighting with his new independent Senate over splitting the infrastructure bank from the omnibus budget bill, but if the Liberals had kept their promises and worked with parliamentarians and not used budget omnibus bills, they would not be in this awkward, difficult situation.

The finance minister revealed his hand last week at committee, when he said it would be “absurd” to tell a private company to move a project from Montreal to Winnipeg. Why are the Liberals putting corporate profit ahead of the interests of Canadians, and why will they not allow us to properly study this bill?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made a commitment to Canadians to improve the way this place works, and that is exactly what we are doing. The budget legislation we put forward contains only elements that were actually in the budget, unlike the previous government's attempts at getting around the parliamentary process.

As for the work done by the Senate, we respect tremendously the hard work senators are doing to examine and make recommendations on bills, but we certainly expect budget bills passed in this House of Commons to be passed by the Senate.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the issue here is about respect for Parliament and passing a fundamental change to how we fund infrastructure projects. Without proper study is not the way to do it.

[*Translation*]

Clearly, there were not enough consultations, and the most blatant example relates to Quebec, since the infrastructure bank is going to ignore Quebec laws. A more thorough study of the bill would have allowed us to examine these kinds of issues related to the infrastructure bank. There is no time for that under the leadership of this Prime Minister.

Why is the government so determined to move ahead with this plan for the infrastructure bank? Why is it so determined to keep us from giving it the consideration it deserves?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made a commitment over a year and a half ago to create the infrastructure bank. It was a clear campaign promise. We will continue to invest in the infrastructure that Canadians need.

I understand that the members opposite want to spend all their time negotiating and examining everything that happens in the House, but sooner or later, we have to deliver on the commitments made to Canadians. We need to keep our promises regarding the public transit Canadians need, as well as social infrastructure. That is exactly what our government is doing for Quebec, for Quebeckers, and for all Canadians.

* * *

• (1430)

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister thinks highly of the Chinese dictatorship. We also know that the Prime Minister invested hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars in an Asian bank. We also know that the Prime Minister met with Chinese billionaires who made very generous contributions to his father's foundation. None of that, however, gives the Prime Minister permission to put Canada's national security at risk.

Why did the Prime Minister waive the requisite security review of the Norsat deal?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, national security is a top priority for our government.

All transactions reviewed under the act are subject to a multi-stage security review process. We can assure the House that the process was followed to the letter and that no risk to national security was identified. Throughout the process, our security agencies had access to all the information they needed.

We have never compromised on national security, and we never will.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect and admiration for the parliamentary secretary. The problem is that my question was for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is the one who needs to answer to Canadians on issues of national security.

If the government insists everything was done by the book, then there is just one more thing for the Prime Minister to do to reassure Canadians and our NATO, American, and European allies who are questioning Canada's national security.

Why is the government refusing to table all of the documents relating to the Norsat scandal?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we listened to our national security experts. We listened to their advice. They reviewed the transaction and the facts. We authorized this transaction based on their advice and recommendations.

Oral Questions

I want to reassure the House and all Canadians that we will never compromise on national security and we will always work to advance our national interests.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Norsat scandal, the Liberals just cannot keep their story straight.

First, the Prime Minister claimed the U.S. was on board, but it was not. Then he said the deal was subject to a strict, national security review, but it was not. In fact, the Prime Minister's own cabinet decided to skip that review.

This deal puts Canada and the U.S. at risk. Without rigid security checks, the Liberals still gave it the green light.

Will the Liberals listen to the concerns of the U.S., our closet friend and ally, and put Canadian safety first?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, national security is our priority, and we take it very seriously.

All investments reviewed under the Canada Investment Act are subject to a multi-stage national security review process conducted by our security agencies. That process was followed. The national security community conducted a review, consulted, had the facts in front of it. It gave us the recommendation that this transaction did not put into jeopardy national security. No transaction would take place if it did not uphold and satisfy this criterion.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are hiding how dangerous this deal is for both Canada and the U.S. Nobody buys that.

Michael Wessel from the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission said, "the sale of Norsat to a Chinese entity raises significant national-security concerns for the United States as the company is a supplier to our military."

The Liberals claim they have consulted the U.S., but will not say who, why, how, or when. Nothing adds up.

Will the minister finally tell Canadians which U.S. officials they consulted and if they agreed to this deal?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I am surprised the party opposite does not trust our national security agencies and does not trust the opinions they give.

We have a process in place under the Investment Canada Act. We followed that process. Our security agencies are required to consult, investigate, and to have all the facts in front of them. They did that. They gave us their opinion; we followed that opinion. Our national security has never been put at risk.

• (1435)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada and our allies depend on satellite communications to safely perform peace and security operations around the world. The news that the Liberal government has fast-tracked the sale of Norsat is causing the

U.S. government to review its use of Norsat components. Why? Because the U.S. feels it could put its operations and its people at risk.

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. Why is the Liberal government putting the security of Canada and allies at risk all to appease the Chinese government?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are not compromising our national security. We are not compromising our national interests. We are in fact trying to balance our national interests.

We relied on a process that put our national security first and foremost. That process was followed. Our national security agencies did their due diligence. They investigated the transaction. They had all the facts in front of them. They gave us their opinion. We are following that opinion. We trust our national security agencies. We will never put our security at risk.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has attended cash-for-access fundraisers with Chinese billionaires. He has publicly expressed his admiration for the basic dictatorship in China. Chinese interests are funding a statue of his father. Now the Prime Minister is fast-tracking the sale of Canadian businesses to China without full security reviews.

Our former ambassador to China has called the Prime Minister's approach "naive and worrying." I agree.

Has the government House leader asked the Ethics Commissioner about possible conflicts of interest with respect to the Prime Minister and transactions involving China?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a very clear process envisioned under the Investment Canada Act. It is a multi-step process that requires our national security agencies to look at the facts, get the facts in front of them, and make a national security recommendation. We followed that process to the letter. We followed their advice.

We trust our national security agencies, which have done their due diligence. We have undertaken this multi-step process, as it should have been undertaken.

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[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the OECD's instigation, Canada signed dozens of information sharing agreements with tax havens. Those agreements were supposed to increase transparency, but all they did was facilitate tax evasion. What began as a solution to a problem became a massive gift to big corporations.

Oral Questions

Over the past five years, at least \$55 billion in profit has not been taxed by the Canada Revenue Agency. We have no way of knowing if the Liberals have even used the agreements because they are refusing to tell us and will not answer journalists' questions.

What do they have to hide?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government pledged to fight tax evasion and tax havens to ensure that our tax system is fair for all Canadians. I am proud of the leadership we have shown internationally by enhancing our collaboration with international partners. We are working hard to make sure our tax system is fair.

Our government will continue to inform Canadians about our efforts to fight tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because that answer was so gosh darn convincing, I have another one for the minister.

Her Liberal government is refusing to reveal to Canadians important information about tax cheats, even after the minister's promise to reveal important information about tax cheats. The minister's office now says that it is not its responsibility to release this information. Really? It is not the responsibility of the minister's office to tackle tax evasion and keep the minister's own promises?

If the minister is not running her department, could she tell us who the heck is? If she will not do her job, will she at least find somebody who can?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to offshore-related files, the CRA is currently conducting audits on over 820 taxpayers and criminally investigating over 20 cases of tax evasion. Information shared under tax information sharing agreements and tax treaties is yielding results. I want to make it very clear that we will ensure our tax system is fair by ferreting out tax cheats and making them pay.

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[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is becoming clear that the Prime Minister's approval to sell Canadian senior care facilities to Anbang Insurance of China has placed our seniors at risk.

Questions went unanswered when the deal was first inked, but the Liberals said everything would be just fine. Now Anbang's chairman, Mr. Wu, has been arrested by Chinese officials on corruption charges. Anbang's assets, including the B.C. retirement homes, are now at risk of being taken over by the Chinese government.

With so many warning signs, why did the Prime Minister not do any due diligence before he approved this deal?

• (1440)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr.

Speaker, our government is open to investments that create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for Canadians. While the official opposition continues with its scare tactics and fearmongering, let us talk about the facts.

The day-to-day operations of the residences will continue to be managed by Retirement Concepts, the same management that was there before. Rules are not changing. The residents will continue to be subject to the same robust provincial health regulations that have always applied to them. The residents and health care workers will continue to be protected by the same legislation.

We did our homework on this transaction. We assured what we had to make certain, and we have done it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the innovation minister assured the House that the government had done its homework and there was no reason for Canadians to be concerned. He passed the buck to B.C. to regulate these homes.

Anbang is a company with murky ownership built on risky investments. U.S. and Chinese regulators have raised serious concerns over its dealings. When the wolves of Wall Street will not touch Anbang, how could the Liberals use vulnerable seniors as pawns for the Prime Minister's insatiable appetite to cozy up to China?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the application by Cedar Tree to acquire Retirement Concepts has been approved under the Investment Canada Act. The acquisition will result in a net economic benefit to Canada. As a result of that review, Cedar Tree has agreed to maintain the current level of full-time and part-time employees, maintain a current Canadian operator, Retirement Concepts, to continue to manage the business, not close or repurpose any of the existing residences, and to financially support the expansion of business. This will remain in place for a significant period of time.

We reviewed the transaction under the Investment Canada Act. The Government of British Columbia is doing its part—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals keep telling us that they take judicial appointments seriously, yet to date there are still judicial vacancies right across the country. Under our Conservative government, we appointed more than 500 judicial appointments. If the Liberals are incapable of doing their job, the opposition would be more than happy to do it for them.

Oral Questions

These delays in the criminal justice system must end and criminals must be prosecuted. When are the Liberals going to start taking this job seriously and fill all the judicial vacancies without excuses?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take my responsibility to appoint superior court justices in the country incredibly seriously. I am very pleased to have introduced a new appointments process that is open and transparent. I am very happy to have appointed 77 justices across the country to the superior courts. I will continue to appoint justices to the superior courts to fill the vacancies.

We will continue to work collaboratively with the provinces and territories to ensure we have substantive solutions to address the realities of the delays that exist in the criminal justice system across the country.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice likes to say that she is proud of her record. Is the minister proud of the near-historic number of judicial vacancies? Is the minister proud of the fact that nearly half of the judicial advisory committees remain vacant? Is the minister proud of the dozens of serious criminal cases that have been thrown out of court due to her inaction, with thousands more at risk?

How can the minister say she is proud of that record with a straight face?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud of the 77 meritorious, diverse—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Members soon will be undoubtedly leaving Ottawa and will have the chance to do lots of yelling if they want, perhaps in their own ridings outside of Ottawa. However, I ask members to try to restrain themselves at least for the next few days. Maybe they will have a chance, on occasion, even to yell “fore” one of these days.

The hon. Minister of Justice has the floor.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I am incredibly proud of the 77 substantive, meritorious Superior Court justices who I have been able to appoint thus far. More appointments are going to be coming.

The appointees represent the diversity that is our great country. I am going to continue to make these appointments. Likewise, I am going to continue to substantively work with my counterparts in the provinces and territories to address the call of the Supreme Court of Canada to ensure that there is a culture change among all actors in the criminal justice system. There is no one solution to this. We are working—

• (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' approach to official languages is a joke.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage forgot to extend the interim commissioner's mandate. As of Saturday, we no longer have an official languages watchdog. Before that, the Liberals announced the partisan appointment of Madeleine Meilleur with absolutely no regard for the law or Parliament. This is all the doing of a minister who tells us every day that official languages are a priority for the government. Really?

When will the government get serious and respect the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that official languages are important to our government and that the official languages commissioner is, too.

We will have an official languages commissioner. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is fully operational and I will be making some announcements soon.

* * *

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while millions of Canadian children were celebrating Father's Day yesterday, Raif Badawi's children Najwa, Myriyam and Doudi lamented their father's absence, which is going on five years now. Last week, Raif Badawi's three children appealed directly to the Prime Minister when they said, quote, “Mr. [Prime Minister], pick up the phone, call the king of Saudi Arabia, so our father comes back.” In 2015, before his election of course, the hon. member for Papineau urged Mr. Harper to intervene personally in this case.

What does the Prime Minister have to say today to the children of Raif Badawi?

[English]

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has raised the case of Mr. Badawi at the highest levels of the Saudi government.

We continue to ask for clemency, so he can be reunited with his family. I have had the opportunity and the privilege of meeting with his wife on multiple occasions. I have reassured her that our government, our Prime Minister, and our Minister of Foreign Affairs are engaged on this case. We will continue to appeal for clemency for Mr. Badawi.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for decades the Canadian government actively discriminated against gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer Canadians. Thousands of public servants and military personnel were fired for their sexual orientation, forced to live double lives or risk loss of employment or even criminal conviction.

Oral Questions

I am proud of our government's efforts to build stronger ties with my community, working for rights at home and abroad. However, still more remains to be done. Could the Minister of Justice update us on steps the government is taking to heal the wounds in the LGBTQ2 community?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud of the work our government is doing.

In Canada we embrace diversity and inclusion. We have to ensure that everybody has the freedom to be who they are. That is why I am incredibly proud that the Senate passed Bill C-16 last week. I look forward to it receiving royal assent and adding to the Canadian Human Rights Code a prohibition against gender identity and gender expression.

We are doing more. We are looking at historic records and the expungement of them for unjust laws. In this month of pride, I want to celebrate and applaud the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' mismanagement of the fighter jet replacement has gone from a national scandal to an international embarrassment.

Over the weekend, officials were instructed to meet with aerospace companies in Paris, then they were told to cancel those meetings, and then they were told to reschedule them. The Minister of National Defence has made a complete mess of this file.

Is there anyone on the Liberal benches, anyone at all, who can fix this comedy of errors and actually hold an open competition to replace our aging fighter jets now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to conducting an open and transparent competition for the permanent replacement of the fleet of fighter jets. This competitive process will help ensure that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces have the best aircraft for the long term, while getting the best value for money and generating the most economic benefits for Canadians. We have begun to develop the bid solicitation process. The initial consultations with the industry will begin in 2017.

• (1450)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal plan to replace Canada's fighter jets has become a real farce, and the farce has even spread to the international stage. That side of the House cannot even organize a simple meeting with representatives from the aerospace industry. On top of that, most stakeholders have lost all confidence in the Minister of National Defence, so this file has become a massive boondoggle.

Does the Prime Minister understand the magnitude of the problem? Will he bring his minister into line and immediately launch an open and transparent process?

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that in the policy statement, the chief of the defence staff said that it was a great day for our men and women in uniform.

Yes, we will ensure that our military personnel have the right equipment to carry out their mission. First and foremost, we have commitments to our NORAD and NATO allies. That is why we want to replace our aging equipment, so that our men and women in uniform can properly carry out their missions at home and abroad.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody trusts the Liberals to deliver on that promise.

The Liberals unveiled their defence and foreign policies, and surprise, surprise, there were no details of a UN peacekeeping mission in either of them. It has been almost a year since the Prime Minister naively promised 600 troops to a vague UN peacekeeping mission. Documents show that the Liberals have turned down five UN leadership roles and will not commit to a single UN mission.

The Prime Minister has said that Canada is back. Now he is backing away from UN peacekeeping missions after stepping back from the fight against ISIS. When will the Prime Minister finally step up and quit embarrassing Canada on the world stage?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, Canada did announce that it was back in the world and will play a significant role in international and multilateral institutions, including as a determined peace-builder returning to peace support operations. That was a commitment of our government, and we will restore Canada's role in peace support missions. We are taking our time, thoughtfully, to decide what mission Canada will lead in. We are doing that because that is what Canadians expect of us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nearly one year after the Prime Minister made the ill-advised promise to send 600 Canadian soldiers on some sort of peacekeeping mission, we are still in the dark.

The Liberals could have given us the details of this mission in their defence or foreign affairs policies, but once again, it is radio silence. We have now learned that Canada has refused five interesting offers from the UN.

Could the Prime Minister finally tell our soldiers what is going on, rather than using them as pawns to try to win a seat on the UN Security Council?

Oral Questions

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is steadfast in renewing its commitment to the United Nations. Maintaining international peace and stability, including within the United Nations, is one of the core missions assigned to the Canadian Armed Forces in “Strong, Secure, Engaged”.

The new policy reiterates Canada's determination to make a meaningful contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping operations and add value to them.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, deaths from suicide devastate our community. There are too many unanswered questions regarding why so many veterans turn to self-harm. Mr. Lionel Desmond not only ended his own life but also the lives of his daughter, his partner, and his mother. This terrible tragedy needs to be examined. Will the minister take responsibility and call an inquiry into the triple murder-suicide of Lionel Desmond, to shed some light and find a remedy for our veterans who are suffering?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the suicide of a veteran is always a tragedy.

We are working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to update our practices in order to provide better support to veterans and their families and to ensure that we are not only doing the right things, but also becoming a leader in the area.

In budget 2017, we announced the opening of a centre of excellence on mental health for post-traumatic stress disorder in order to encourage the use of best practices and reduce stigma.

* * *

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was an inquiry my colleague called for.

Today, the minister unveiled a strategy on gender-based violence. While we do need data and RCMP training, there is absolutely nothing for front-line services to support survivors of sexual assault. Every night, 500 women and kids are turned away from domestic violence shelters in Canada—500 of them.

Why does this so-called anti-violence strategy have absolutely nothing for women fleeing violence and for the front-line workers who support them?

● (1455)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that all women and girls can live free from violence. This is why we are investing \$100.9 million in a strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. The strategy we released today is

based on prevention, support for survivors and their families, and promoting responsive legal and justice systems; and it will build a solid foundation for action and fill important gaps in support for survivors of gender-based violence. Today was a very good day in the fight against gender-based violence.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the courts ruled that Onion Lake Cree Nation must post its financial transparency information in accordance with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. This is a great victory for Charmaine Stick and those across the country. We now have a judgment that clearly states the minister was irresponsible and wrong in not enforcing the act.

Will she commit today that she will empower band members and that no other people will have to take their band to court for transparency, yes or no?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government agrees that first nations individuals should be able to access their communities' financial information. We have already launched national mutual accountability engagements with first nations, community leaders, and members, including both in-person and online engagements. We have also been working on mutual accountability for almost a year with the AFN and the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association. Everyone, including first nations governments, wants increased transparency and accountability, and we will achieve this in the coming months, working in partnership with first nations.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 18 months, and they are doing nothing to enforce a law that is on our books. Her excuses have never held water.

Let me read from the court judgment, which states:

There is no evidence before me as to the political or economic reasons why Onion Lake has refused to provide and post specified information. There is, for example, no evidence that Onion Lake's commercial interests would be negatively affected.

Will the minister follow the direction of the judge, or is she going to force more band members to plead their cases in front of the courts, yes or no?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes mutual accountability seriously. All contribution agreements between our government and first nations contain strong reporting provisions to ensure that funds are used as intended. We remain committed to establishing a new fiscal relationship with first nations, including to strengthen mutual accountability measures. In support of this commitment, my department is currently engaging, from coast to coast to coast, with first nations leadership and community members.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of words that say that the minister is refusing to enforce the law. Why can she not just stand up and say, “I am refusing to enforce the law here”, and does she realize that, as a result of her negligence, band members are having to go to court to get information to which they are rightfully entitled?

Why is the member defending the status quo instead of doing what is right for first nations communities?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree. The government agrees that first nations individuals should be able to access their communities' financial information. We have launched a national mutual accountability engagement with first nations, including in-person and online engagements. Everyone, including first nations, wants increased transparency and accountability, and we will achieve this by working in close collaboration with first nations.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, we learned that search warrants had been executed in the Toronto area and in the United Kingdom in connection with a criminal investigation into a transatlantic GST/HST fraud scheme. Reports indicate that this “carousel scheme” netted \$52 million in fraudulent tax refunds and credits.

Would the Minister of National Revenue tell the House what she is doing to combat fraud?

● (1500)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hull—Aylmer for his question.

Our government is committed to fighting tax evasion and tax avoidance. That is why we invested close to \$1 billion in our last two budgets to ensure we have the tools we need tackle this problem effectively.

Preliminary results indicate that we will recover over \$13 billion during the fiscal year ending March 31.

Our government is committed to cracking down on tax cheats and bringing them to justice with the help of our international partners.

TAXATION

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with Canada's 150th anniversary just around the corner, Canadians have much to celebrate. We will be celebrating with an amazing craft beer, wine, and spirits. However, in typical Liberal fashion, as we raise a glass to celebrate Canada, they are finding new ways to raise taxes to pay for their out-of-control spending. This year and every following year, the Liberals will be raising taxes on beer, wine, and spirits, despite the fact that we already pay some of the highest taxes in the world.

Could the minister please explain that the only promise he is willing to keep is a promise to raise taxes and tax the fun out of our Canada Day celebrations?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House and talk about the good work our government is doing. The first thing we did when we took office was lower taxes for middle-class Canadians, while raising them for the wealthiest 1%. We also put in place the Canada child benefit program, which has lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. We also increased the guaranteed income supplement by 10% for low-income seniors.

We will keep on working for Canadians. That is exactly what we will be doing.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently met with executive members of the BC Fruit Growers' Association and the Canadian Horticultural Council, representing produce growers in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia. They told me that Canadian growers suffer greatly when their buyer fails to pay them due to bankruptcy.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture unanimously urged the minister to develop a payment protection model for Canada's growers, but nothing has happened. It has been a year. When will the government take action to protect our fruit and vegetable growers?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely committed to the financial success of the fruit and vegetable industry.

We are looking at ways we can support this important Canadian industry by collaborating on a national nutrition policy as part of the next strategic framework. We support the industry in our budget and will continue to marshal science, innovation, and competition for the benefit of all agricultural sectors and producers across the country.

*Oral Questions**[English]***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far too many Canadians still face violence every day simply because of their gender expression, gender identity, or perceived gender. Our status of women committee, of which I am vice-chair, studied this issue, and I think we would all agree it is time for us to take action.

Budget 2017 committed \$100.9 million for a gender-based violence strategy. Could the parliamentary secretary to the minister of status of women update the House on the status of this strategy?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington for the question, and for her leadership on gender equality.

I was pleased to join the Minister of Status of Women this morning as she announced our government's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. Our strategy is based on prevention, support for survivors and their families, and promoting responsive legal and justice systems. Our approach will build a solid foundation for action.

It is time for Canada's strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals just cannot help themselves. They love picking winners and losers by imposing big-government regulations. Now the Liberals are targeting credit unions by prohibiting their use of the terms “bank” and “banking”. This means if a credit union uses a term like “personal banking” or “online banking” in their promotions, they run afoul of the rules and could face penalties between \$500,000 and \$5 million.

Could the finance minister explain to Canadians why his government is being so petty in the targeting of credit unions? Is it because all of his friends on Bay Street are telling him to do this?

• (1505)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the credit union system is an important part of the Canadian economy and contributes to competition in financial services. Credit unions are key suppliers of financing for small and medium-sized businesses, and also for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We have encouraged the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to get in touch with the credit unions and to work collaboratively to ensure they come up with a solution that can work for both.

* * *

*[Translation]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure bank needs to be split off from Bill C-44. Enough with these massive bills and poison

pills hidden in 500-page tomes. The infrastructure bank is a bad idea that is going to weaken Quebec to the benefit of wealthy investors.

Will the Prime Minister listen to Quebec, the farmers, and even the Senate and remove the infrastructure bank from Bill C-44?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect us to build the best public transit to reduce the gridlock facing our communities. They want us to invest in more affordable housing to create opportunities for Canadians. They want to invest in recreational and cultural infrastructure.

That is exactly what our infrastructure plan, an ambitious \$186-billion plan, will do. With respect to the jurisdictions of provinces and municipalities, the bank will do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what the Liberals are missing. The way Bill C-44 is drafted, the infrastructure bank can ignore the laws of Quebec and circumvent municipal bylaws. No agricultural zoning, and the power to expropriate: that is what will come out of Bill C-44. We have said it, the constitutionalists have said it, the National Assembly has said it, the farmers have said it, and even the Senate has said it.

When will this government listen to us and split its bill to have a second look at its infrastructure bank?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to be working with our Quebec caucus to deliver on the commitment that we made to all Canadians, including the Province of Quebec. A \$1.3 billion investment in Montreal's transit system will create 34,000 jobs in that region.

That is delivering for Canadians. That is delivering for the Province of Quebec. As far as the legislation is concerned, we are very confident that the way it is being done will respect the local jurisdictions in Quebec and in other provinces.

* * *

*[Translation]***SOFTWOOD LUMBER**

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, forestry workers are demonstrating across Quebec today to call on the government to negotiate a fair and balanced agreement on softwood lumber. That may seem obvious, but the forestry sector has learned not to trust Ottawa.

Arguing over guarantees has cost weeks of work for workers, who are more than ready for a bit of stability.

Government Orders

Will the government make a solemn promise to refuse to sign any sellout agreement that could hurt forestry workers?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question because it is a chance to remind the House of the significance of the measures that we have undertaken to make sure, both in the short term and in the long term, that the forestry industry is respected in Canada.

That includes \$605 million from the Export Development Corporation. It includes very timely measures to expand export markets. That includes taking the leaders of the industry in Quebec to China to begin to make the argument that our wood is the best wood in the world.

We are very proud of that initiative. We are very proud of how we have stood up for the forestry—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond on a point of order.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out that my parliamentary privileges, and those of the other members of the House, have been violated.

The Commissioner of Official Languages reports not only to the government, but also to Parliament. As a result, Parliament must know who the Commissioner of Official Languages is so it can address this individual, ask questions, and receive information.

Today, I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage who the current Commissioner of Official Languages is and at what time we will know when a new Commissioner of Official Languages is appointed.

We currently do not know who the official languages commissioner is. Perhaps the government knows, but if we parliamentarians do not know, then this is a violation of our rights as parliamentarians, because commissioners do not report to the government, but to Parliament as a whole.

● (1510)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. I will look into this matter and, if necessary, come back to the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORTATION MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed from June 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-49, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and other acts respecting transportation and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: It being 3:10 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 30, 2017, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-49.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I attempted to rise to vote yea before you called for the votes on the nay side, and I do not think my vote was recorded.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. That will be recorded accordingly.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 337*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Alleslev
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Baylis
Bennett
Blair
Bossio
Breton
Caesar-Chavannes
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chen
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Di Iorio
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Goldsmith-Jones
Graham
Hajdu
Hehr
Housefather
Hutchings
Joly
Jordan
Kang
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
Maloney
May (Saamich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald

Alghabra
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Beech
Bittle
Boissonnault
Bratina
Brisson
Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chan
Cormier
Dabrusin
DeCoursey
Dhillon
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gerretsen
Gould
Grewal
Hardie
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jones
Jowhari
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCrimmon
McGuinty

Points of Order

McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Medicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef	Morrissey
Murray	Nassif
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Poissant
Qualtrough	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Sahota	Saini
Samson	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sohi
Sorbara	Spengemann
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Trudeau
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Zahid — 161	

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Ambrose
Anderson	Arnold
Aubin	Barlow
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard
Brousseau	Cannings
Caron	Carrie
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Cooper
Cullen	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dubé	Dusseault
Duvall	Eglinski
Falk	Fortin
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gill
Gladu	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Hoback	Hughes
Jeneroux	Johns
Kelly	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière
Leitch	Liepert
Lobb	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Malcolmson	Marcil
Masse (Windsor West)	Mathysen
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Moore	Motz
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	O'Toole
Paul-Hus	Paupé
Plamondon	Quach
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Ritz
Saganash	Sansoucy
Saroya	Schmale
Shields	Shipley

Ste-Marie	Stetski
Stewart	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Thériault	Tilson
Trost	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vecchio
Viersen	Wagantall
Warkentin	Webber
Weir	Wong
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order to do with decorum in this House. I asked a question of the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women today, and in spite of the fact that he stands right in front of me, I could not hear his answer.

In 1982, Margaret Mitchell stood in this House and was heckled when she talked about violence against women. I would have hoped that 35 years later, members of this House would stop heckling when we are talking about gender-based violence. I should be able to hear the hon. member's answer to my question, especially with him sitting right in front of me.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington for her point of order. I urge all members to show respect for this place, and I would prefer for each other as well.

The hon. member for Perth—Wellington is rising on a point of order.

APPOINTMENT OF CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that in a few moments, the government will be moving motion No. 635 on the Order Paper to appoint, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, the new Clerk of the House of Commons. I believe you will find, Mr. Speaker, upon review of the evidence, that this motion should be ruled out of order at this time.

As you know, the ancient rule of anticipation is one that is little employed in its application to this body, but nonetheless, it is instructive to the operation of the House. I would suggest that in the matter at hand, the application of this rule is appropriate and necessary.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is presently seized with the proposed nomination and has met for barely 45 minutes on this matter, but it has not yet reported back to the House either in the affirmative or the negative. It is for this reason that the rule of anticipation would apply.

Points of Order

I would note that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 560, accurately notes:

While the rule of anticipation is part of the Standing Orders in the British House of Commons, it has never been so in the Canadian House of Commons. Furthermore, references to past attempts to apply this British rule to Canadian practice are inconclusive.

However, it goes on to note:

The rule is dependent on the principle which forbids the same question from being decided twice within the same session.

In this circumstance, I would submit that going forward with this motion at this time anticipates that the procedure and House affairs committee would not submit a report to the House in the negative.

I draw your attention to *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, which is instructive on this point. Page 154, citation 514(2), states:

Debate on a government motion effectively blocks debate on a notice of motion for the consideration of the report of a committee which deals with essentially the same subject. Had the motion for consideration of the committee report been moved, it would have had precedence over the government motion and blocked debate on it. Once a motion has been transferred for debate under Government Orders it becomes the government's decision and the government's responsibility to decide whether it will proceed with its motion. It is at that point that the anticipation rule might become operative in the sense that the government motion, if proceeded with, might block consideration of the committee report.

It further states, at page 154, in citation 513(1):

In determining whether a discussion is out of order on the grounds of anticipation, the Speaker must have regard to the probability of the matter anticipated being brought before the House within a reasonable [period of] time.

The circumstances previewed in *Beauchesne's* are precisely the scenario in which we find ourselves today. The matter is very likely to return to the House in a more appropriate form, that being a report from the procedure and House affairs committee, the committee to which the matter was referred, pursuant to the Standing Orders, and the matter can and will be brought to the House within a reasonable period of time one way or another. Either the matter will be reported back by the committee within 30 days, or the 30 days provided by the Standing Orders will have expired. Either way, the matter will have been dealt with conclusively within a reasonable period of time, as envisioned by the authorities.

Further, last Thursday I filed with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs a certificate to obtain evidence from particular persons, pursuant to Standing Order 122.

Mr. Speaker, you are both the Speaker of this place and a lawyer. The analogy I would use is one of a legal nature. In this case, judgment is being sought prior to the evidence being presented. I know you would not accept this in a court of law, and neither should it be accepted in this place.

I am well aware that the Standing Orders of the House do not explicitly state the rule of anticipation. However, I would draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 1, which states:

In all cases not provided for hereinafter, or by other Order of the House, procedural questions shall be decided by the Speaker or Chair of Committees of the Whole, whose decisions shall be based on the usages, forms, customs and precedents of the House of Commons of Canada and on parliamentary tradition in Canada and other jurisdictions, so far as they may be applicable to the House.

On this matter, I would submit that the rule of anticipation is evident in comparable jurisdictions but has also become a usual

practice of the House, particularly in dealing with the subject matter at hand.

Standing Order 28 of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom states:

In determining whether a discussion is out of order on the ground of anticipation, regard shall be had by the Speaker to the probability of the matter anticipated being brought before the House within a reasonable time.

● (1525)

I would draw your attention to Erskine May, 24th edition, at page 390, which states:

In determining whether a discussion is out of order on the ground of anticipation, the probability of the matter anticipated being discussed within a reasonable time must be considered...and recent practice has been to interpret the rule so as to not, in the current circumstances, to impose what might risk being unreasonable restrictions on debate.

For greater clarity, I would interpret the 30-day period envisioned by Standing Order 111(1) of this place to be reasonable time. Further, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the proposed motion was put without amendment for debate. Therefore, allowing the motion to go forward at this time would effectively eliminate any potential for further debate, analyses, witnesses, or discussion at the only venue open for such action: the procedure and House affairs committee.

Erskine May goes on to note, at page 398:

...the rule against anticipation...as strictly enforced earlier times, was that a matter must not be anticipated if it were contained in a more effective form of proceeding by which it is sought to be anticipated...

Again, it is the established practice of the House, as noted in *Beauchesne's*, that a motion on a committee report would have been a more effective means rather than government action.

Further to this, Mr. Speaker, I would draw your attention to a Canadian authority on the matter. *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, edited by John George Bourinot, is one of the accepted authorities of this place. At page 339 of Bourinot, it is stated:

The old rule of Parliament reads: "That a question being once made, and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again, but stand as the judgment of the house."

This is an echo of Erskine May's 1844 *A treatise on the law, privileges, proceedings and usage of Parliament*, at page 186, which establishes the same principle.

As both Bourinot and May would foresee, were this motion to go ahead, it would forestall a committee report and concurrence in that report, thereby, the rule of anticipation would be offended.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that a report from procedure and House affairs committee prior to the question being put on the nomination is clearly the established practice of the House.

I would draw to your attention the 47th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, 38th Parliament, 1st Session, in which the committee recommended to the House that the House ratify the appointment of Ms. Audrey Elizabeth O'Brien to the position of Clerk of the House of Commons.

Points of Order

I would note that the now Clerk Emeritus's appointment was the first made under the provisions now contained in Standing Order 111 (1). That report was prior to a vote in the House of Commons.

While the Clerk of the House of Commons has only been appointed once prior pursuant to current rules of this place, it is nonetheless instructive to the process and vision by those who have sat in this place before us.

I well recognize there may be instances in the past where a government has moved in a similar way as the current government is now moving. I know of none off the top of my head. However, the fact that there were no objections in those cases may imply the agreement of the House. This is not the case here. Objection is being stated.

In light of the foregoing evidence presented, I would encourage you, Mr. Speaker, to rule this motion out of order until such time that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has reported back to the House of Commons or the expiration of the 30 days, as provided for in Standing Order 111(1).

I might add as well, Mr. Speaker, that there are rumours around this precinct that you yourself were not consulted on this proposed nomination. If this is the case, and I hope it is not, it is shameful and an offence to the position that you hold and the great respect in which we hold you in this place, as the defender of the rights and privileges of this place.

• (1530)

The Speaker: Does the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard wish to rise on the same point of order?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): I do, Mr. Speaker. With respect, we would submit to you that my colleague has raised an argument without merit.

I would draw your attention to Standing Order 111.(1), which states:

Where the government intends to appoint an Officer of Parliament, the Clerk of the House...the name of the proposed appointee shall be deemed referred to the appropriate standing committee, which may consider the appointment during a period of not more than thirty days.

The rules are clear. The committee may study the proposed nomination, which it has. There is no requirement to report back to the House of Commons on the matter before a vote in the House is taken.

Page 1014, of the second edition, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, states:

As in the case of the procedure for appointments by Order in Council and certificates of nomination, a committee that receives an order of reference in relation to the proposed appointment of an Officer of Parliament has no obligation to consider the matter.

I would urge, Mr. Speaker, and suggest that we could proceed to the business as planned this afternoon.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, you appear poised to rule on this matter.

The hon. member for Perth—Wellington was very thorough and impressive in the academic rigour of his presentation. He did not

make the case that the rule of anticipation has ever been codified in our Standing Orders, but rather that we could have reference to it.

This is a very critical matter for all members of this place. I have to express deep discomfort, because the Clerk will be someone with whom we will all work and on whom we will all rely, and there does seem to be a matter of extreme haste. The position was posted with a deadline of February of this year, while our current Clerk has been in the position in an acting capacity since 2014. I feel there is something of a rush that may undermine the new person and the government's intent to name a new clerk.

The member for Perth—Wellington raises a very strong point, because the parliamentary committee on procedure and House affairs had begun the work of asking questions and pursuing this matter. The appointment of our previous Clerk was by consensus; that clearly would be the preferred route here.

I appreciate your time, Mr. Speaker, in letting me weigh in to support the point of order by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Perth—Wellington, the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, and the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for raising the point of order and for their comments on this point of order.

I want to refer them and colleagues to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, by O'Brien and Bosc, at page 458, which refers to the question of the committee and says:

The committee is not obliged to report to the House on the appointment, even if it has been examined.

Then it says, down below:

The notice of motion to ratify the appointment may be given at any time during this 30-day period, whether the committee has reported to the House or not, and the motion may be adopted before the end of this period.

Both of these suggest that in fact the report from the committee is not required in order to proceed.

Also, footnote 248 says:

In the Thirty-Ninth Parliament, the name of the candidate for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages (Graham Fraser) was referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages on September 18, 2006. The notice of motion to ratify the appointment was given on September 27, 2006, and the motion was concurred in on September 29, 2006.

I am informed that in fact in that case the committee did not report.

As a result of these provisions, I am prepared to allow the motion to proceed.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

● (1535)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government response to the report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans entitled “Newfoundland and Labrador’s Northern Cod Fishery: Charting a new sustainable future”. Of course, I thank the committee and all our colleagues for their excellent work.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s responses to five petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2016 annual report on the RCMP’s use of the law enforcement justification provisions.

[English]

This report addresses the RCMP’s use of specific provisions within the law enforcement justification regime, which is set out in sections 25(1) to sections 25(4) of the Criminal Code. This report also documents the nature of the investigations in which these provisions were used.

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Hon. Jim Carr (for the Minister of Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Abolition of Early Parole Act.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[Translation]

FEDERAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-58, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 34th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, entitled “Question of Privilege Regarding the Free Movement of Members of Parliament within the Parliamentary Precinct”.

● (1540)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food regarding its study on debt in the agriculture sector and its effects.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled “Mental Health of Canadian Veterans: A Family Purpose”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative members on Veterans Affairs committee wish to provide a supplementary report on “Mental Health of Canadian Veterans: A Family Purpose”.

It is the opinion of Conservative members on committee that the final version of the ACVA report failed to accurately portray the effect that the use of mefloquine by the Canadian Armed Forces had on our veterans and their families with respect to post-traumatic stress injuries and occupational stress illnesses and the steps required to be taken in order to help veterans and their families.

The supplementary report, in our view, is a better indication of the testimony from witnesses at Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and calls for supplementary recommendations based on that testimony.

Routine Proceedings

While there was much to agree on with the report on how to help veterans and their families dealing with PTSD and mental health issues, the majority on committee failed in its obligation to consider that testimony of veterans relevant to the study. As a result, Conservative members on committee are compelled to present this supplementary report to the House.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the unanimous ninth report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled “Breaking Point: The Suicide Crisis in Indigenous Communities”.

The committee wishes to express our heartfelt gratitude to all those who bravely presented to our committee and shared their personal experiences, providing us with a deeper understanding of the crisis facing indigenous communities and Canada as a nation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (economic substance).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce a bill that would amend the Income Tax Act of Canada.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Sherbrooke, who seconded this bill.

[*English*]

This bill would crack down on abusive tax avoidance by denying tax breaks to transactions that lack real economic substance. These empty transactions, designed solely to avoid taxes, would no longer qualify for tax breaks.

Three years ago, I introduced a similar bill. Dr. Robert McMechan was present in the gallery. He was an expert in the field and was calling for this reform in his acclaimed book on international tax evasion. He has since passed away. Today I want to formally recognize his years of service to Canada as general counsel in the tax litigation section of the Department of Justice, and also acknowledge how valuable his expertise was to me in preparing this bill.

The bill would bring our laws up to speed with places like the United States, where President Obama used a similar law to raise billions for health care. It would build trust in the fairness and integrity of our tax system and recover hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue so we can offer better public services to Canadians. I look forward to discussing it with all members.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, presented on Wednesday, June 15, be concurred in.

I am pleased to rise today, because it gives me the opportunity to speak about a report published by the Standing Committee on Official Languages, more specifically, the one dealing with the Translation Bureau.

As committee members, we heard a number of witnesses express their concerns about the Translation Bureau and the changes that the government could make. Those witnesses voiced their concerns, as well as the Translation Bureau's concerns, in light of the government's plans to try a new approach when it comes to freelancers, namely, hiring more of the lowest bidders.

Of course, a number of witnesses appeared. Members from the Association of Translators and Interpreters appeared on a number of occasions. They made representations to our respective offices, to the opposition members, saying that it made no sense since this approach would undermine the quality of translation and interpretation in the House of Commons and in all the committees. That is why we have worked very hard to ensure that we can avoid this kind of situation. We know full well that, whether in the private sector or here in the government, if the lowest bidder is always chosen, the quality of the final product tends to suffer.

In our circumstances, it cannot all come down to money. Let us be clear: translation in the House of Commons, just like in all the committees, must be done properly. It is certainly important not to choose the lowest bidder all the time. Everyone agrees that costs inevitably become a factor, but at some point, we must ensure that we have high-quality translation and interpretation.

Members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters came and testified. They were united and spoke loud and clear to all parliamentarians to make sure that we did not take this course of action. They expressed their concerns more than once. I want to congratulate them today because they really took on this government provision, which would have had real consequences on translation quality.

It would have had a serious adverse impact on the work that parliamentarians must do here. I do not wear my earpiece while I am talking because I would hear myself, but inevitably and on a regular basis, all of us here in the House need proper and professional translation and interpretation services.

The International Association of Conference Interpreters, among others, represents people who do exceptional work. Their services are not just required in the House and in committees, they are in demand around the world when there is a need for interpreters.

Routine Proceedings

Once again, the Standing Committee on Official Languages and in particular the government have official languages obligations. The government must do all in its power to ensure that official languages are respected without compromise throughout Canada and in all committees.

As a result of the excellent work done by our committee, the government was forced to reverse course, on February 9. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement confirmed that the government would step back from these changes. The committee worked accordingly and acted on behalf of all the people involved in the world of interpretation and translation. Luckily, the government has seen reason since the committee, as I was saying earlier, has had numerous meetings, even inside the caucuses, which is actually quite rare. We had the opportunity to meet with people from the International Association of Conference Interpreters who have been applying pressure. As I personally mentioned it in committee, those people did so in a very professional manner.

• (1545)

It was a great opportunity to show that we can work together on decisions that are important to the government and particularly to us as parliamentarians.

On February 9, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement confirmed that the government would not be going ahead with the changes it had been about to make, luckily. The committee asked the minister to meet the commitments she made publicly regarding the Translation Bureau on February 9. The report mentioned the following, among other things: “Hire a new CEO and ensure the person is in place before 31 March 2017.”

Recently, we learned that the position had been filled, but two months later. This is an example of the problems with the current government. We met last fall, the report was signed in June, when it was a progress report in February, and an appointment was supposedly imminent, but it did not materialize for another four months.

This is just one example among many. Allow me to change direction a bit and talk about the Commissioner of Official Languages. My colleague from the NDP asked the minister who the official languages commissioner is right now since the former commissioner's term ended on Friday. We have no new information on this. The minister reiterates that we will be briefed soon. In my opinion, it is a little late to say “soon”, since we are officially without an official languages commissioner, according to the terms of the six-month contract signed by the outgoing commissioner last December.

This once again demonstrates conclusively that the government is dragging its feet on all appointments, whether to the judiciary or otherwise. The official languages commissioner appointment process was an utter travesty and a complete debacle.

The government often prides itself on being open and transparent, and it did so often during the complete debacle that unfolded over a six-week period to appoint the Commissioner of Official Languages. Having a website where people can apply is all well and good, but that is not what it means to be open and transparent. The law is very

clear: opposition parties must be consulted before appointments are made.

In this regard, the minister told the House on a number of occasions that she had consulted with the opposition parties. My colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix received a call from the minister, who informed her of the Liberals' chosen candidate. Mr. Speaker, if I call you to tell you that I have chosen a candidate, I am telling you something. I am not asking you whether you think that person is a good choice. After everything that went down in this file, no one can deny it was botched from the beginning.

Now, an appointment process is under way to fill several important positions, including the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the Commissioner of Official Languages, although the process had to be started over in the latter case. That case was particularly tainted by the close ties between Ms. Meilleur and the Liberal Party.

When Ms. Meilleur appeared before the committee, she told us that she thought she had no longer been a member of the Liberal Party of Canada since December 2016 or January 2017. In reality, she was a member of the party up until a week before her appointment was officially approved. That was a bombshell. The candidate and the Liberal Party obviously enjoyed close ties, as Ms. Meilleur had contributed not only to the Liberal Party of Canada, but also to the Prime Minister's leadership race. One can understand how this might have the appearance of a partisan appointment.

The 338 members of the House, especially those on the government side, have a duty to find candidates whose neutrality is beyond reproach, as this is a very important element of democracy.

• (1550)

I would like to remind the current government that, when it was in opposition, it never wasted an opportunity to lambaste the government of the day over its appointment; even in the absence of any kind of ties, it still tried to say we made the wrong choice.

Now that these members are in government, they are doing even worse than what others have done in the past. There must be a significant distance between the government and those who would assume such crucial roles in our democracy as Commissioner of Official Languages or Ethics Commissioner. These people must be far removed from all decision-making bodies, as they are the ones who ensure government policy stays on track. They are the ones who must ensure compliance with the spirit of official languages or ethics legislation, for instance.

Routine Proceedings

The report on the Translation Bureau contained several other points, including ensuring that a CEO be appointed. It appears that this was done, but it took four months. The report also called for the creation of a chief quality officer position that would be filled by a language professional that reports directly to the CEO. The idea, then, is to create a new position tasked with ensuring employees' language skills are of the highest quality. I think it should be noted that they are not to compete with external suppliers. In order to survive in a very competitive industry, they must be able to compete with the agents of the associations that serve the government every day.

The report also recommended setting up a service line that federal institutions can call to obtain advice on linguistic services. These are things that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement has committed to doing. It was also expected that the Translation Bureau would hire at least 50 students a year over the next 50 years to ensure succession. That is another very important point.

All these issues came up during testimony. We have also asked that initiatives be implemented to increase the number of interpreter graduates from recognized universities to support additional hiring by the Translation Bureau and the language industry.

The purpose of all this was to ensure the quality of the French language and the number of men and women we need to do the job. We also wanted to ensure the Translation Bureau would restore the co-op program. That program was scrapped by the former government. I must say that we made tough choices at times, and that was one of them. Unfortunately, the consequences, although limited, were still felt.

We also wanted to ensure the Translation Bureau would continue to operate its network of regional offices and that it would work closely with the Canada School of Public Service. We hope that the courses offered to new public servants include training on the Government of Canada's language obligations, including in translation, as of the spring of 2017.

This brings me to the use of French in the public service. I witnessed this first-hand last week when, after the heritage minister appeared before our committee, my assistant gave me an email that we had just received from the office of the Minister of Environment. It was in English only.

Let me quote the catchphrase of the Prime Minister who said that we had to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet "because it is 2015".

Now it is 2017, and it is about time for the government to ensure that each of us receives communications from all parliamentarians, particularly from ministers' offices, in both official languages.

● (1555)

The minister mainly dropped by to tell us, as she did once more today in the House, that official languages are important and they are doing everything they can, but, clearly, they are not doing enough. The simple truth is that they could not care less.

The minister responsible for a major department had sent me a message with some news about my constituency. That is great, but perhaps the minister could have thought to send it in both official languages.

I do not understand how there are still ministers strutting around saying that official languages are important and that they are doing all they can to improve official languages on Parliament Hill, while, as recently as last week, a report from the interim official languages commissioner decried an unbelievable lack of respect for official languages on the Hill.

Whenever 10 government employees, all public servants here in Ottawa, gather in a room together, you can bet they will all switch to English if even just one of them is an English speaker. It is not that people are not bilingual, it is because they feel obliged to speak English when one person does not speak their language.

Inevitably, there remains a lot to be done here on Parliament Hill to ensure the respect of both official languages, starting with the ministers' offices that must ensure communication in both languages with all Canadians, especially by e-mail.

I think that the government still has a lot of work to do. It is certainly guilty of dragging its feet. The Minister of Canadian Heritage may still be patting herself on the back and saying that she is doing all she can, it clearly is not enough.

There were also other recommendations in this report, such as making sure that, following the decision to cancel the request for standing offer, the bureau develops a new approach for awarding contracts based on areas of expertise and further consultations with representatives across the interpretation industry.

Again, the government has come to a decision without bothering to consult. It normally never stops consulting, but in this case it never bothered to consult. It reached a unilateral decision and decreed that this is how things were going to happen. It is no surprise, then, that their solution does not meet the needs of the industry or of this institution which is the House of Commons.

In closing, the committee wanted to thank the translators for their extraordinary contribution. They have been extremely professional. When they appeared before the committee, I told them they deserved our thanks because they had proven that there is indeed a way to change things when we do not agree with a government's decision or approach, and that we can do so respectfully of institutions and individuals alike. When things are done professionally and respectfully, it is easier for people to accept what is being asked of them. That is why the government came to change its mind in light of the committee's work. I think that was a good thing.

Routine Proceedings

Among other official languages issues that have come up over the past year, the committee several times raised that of the appointment of the Commissioner of Official Languages. This appointment was an absolute debacle. I sincerely hope that the government will acknowledge it for what it was and will make sure to consult next time it embarks upon a so-called open and transparent exercise. It is not just a matter of entering one's name on a website. That is not how we want things to happen. We want to be consulted. Consulting means coming to see us and deciding together whether a chosen candidate is a good fit for the job. In matters of official languages, the commissioner must be totally politically neutral in order to act as a watchdog for all Canadians.

● (1600)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, The Environment; and the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, Persons with Disabilities.

● (1605)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to raise a question of privilege regarding translation and interpretation services in the House. It was not only about official languages, English and French, which are obviously very important. My question of privilege was about Canada's heritage languages, its indigenous languages, which are very important to me, in particular Nehiyaw Cree, Anishinaabemowin and Inuktitut.

In the Senate, such languages are interpreted, but not in the House.

What is the hon. member's opinion regarding indigenous languages? Does he think they should have a place in the House?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

He has taught me something that I did not know. Indeed, I did not know there was an interpretation service for indigenous languages in the upper chamber. I find that to be excellent news in that the interpreters who are available for the upper house could potentially make themselves available to the House of Commons.

I do not see how there could be any objection to that. I do not imagine that it happens very often, but it must happen when witnesses are called.

I think that it would be very important, while respecting both official languages, to have the possibility of hearing witnesses from the indigenous community. For me, personally, it would be very good news.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his excellent work alongside all my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

It was one of the first things we studied on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I remember very well because it was the late Mauril Bélanger and I who had suggested that study, in light of all the concerns around the issue at that time.

The Translation Bureau was going through a terrible crisis and hemorrhaging expertise. The unions indicated that there was a lot of stress, that a lot of people were taking sick leave, that the Translation Bureau was literally emptying out.

We all worked hard on the Committee and we presented a very solid report that had a lot of good points. Unfortunately, we had a hard time knowing who was in charge of official languages. We are still asking today and no one can tell us who is currently official languages commissioner. We have a major problem, and it is always the same thing: there is no leadership.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage does not even have the title Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages that she had before, and that is disappointing. When she was asked what the government was going to do for the Translation Bureau, she said that it was not her responsibility, but rather the responsibility of the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. Therefore, let these ministers discuss it a bit and take care of it. We heard this minister's initial response, which was unsatisfactory.

I congratulate all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the Conservatives as much as the Liberals, because together we all said that it did not address our concerns and recommendations and that we were therefore going to call for a new response. In this respect, I have a question for my colleague.

Currently, 400 positions have been cut from the Translation Bureau and there has been a commitment to rehire only about 20. Is more investment needed in staff, particularly translators, interpreters, and terminologists, in order to restore the Translation Bureau to its former glory?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Indeed, we work very well together at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. He is absolutely right on several points in his question and preamble.

Today, we are left wondering who is responsible for official languages. The Minister of Canadian Heritage removed the words "official languages" from her title. The minister took us for fools when she answered questions put to her in the House about the appointment that had been made. She told us that there had not been any communications between the Prime Minister's Office, her office and Ms. Meilleur. It was a real mess.

In my opinion, renewal is important. Staff will be re-hired—the relevant minister has promised to do it—at the Translation Bureau. However, it is to be done properly. The purpose of rehiring is also to make room for young students finishing their education, especially within the team of translators and interpreters in the House of Commons and across government. It is important that there be room for young people within this organization.

Royal Assent

•(1610)
[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt the proceedings, but on a point of order, there have been four government bills that have apparently been tabled. I see on different social media, there are reporters actually citing areas of provisions from those proposed acts. Unfortunately, we still, as parliamentarians, do not have access to those.

Therefore, I would ask that you, Mr. Speaker, investigate, using your office, to make sure that Parliament is respected in this place, which includes ministers tabling their legislation and letting members of Parliament have a view of them before the media.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will ask the table officers to look into it, and we will get back to the House if necessary.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to ask a question of my colleague who, I might add, does outstanding work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Not only does he do outstanding work there, but he is also the chair of the Quebec caucus of the official opposition. I know him very well, and I know that the issue of official languages is an everyday concern to him. I am convinced that our chair sees it as his duty to share anything and everything he hears at caucus with the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would actually like to talk to him about the process to appoint the next official languages commissioner. I think he has had a chance to address it briefly. I say “briefly” even though he talked about it at length, because the saga dragged on in the House for quite some time.

According to him, does all the procrastination in the process of appointing an official languages commissioner not send the wrong message to minority anglophones in Quebec and minority francophones in most other Canadian provinces? Making partisan, political appointments to such an important position in a country like ours may very well lead to a major crisis of confidence on the part of Canadians in minority situations over the entire process that is currently in place to protect Canada's two official languages.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable for asking me that question.

Indeed, submissions have been made and my NDP colleague will agree with us. In the appointment process that took place over the last six or seven weeks, a specific group felt aggrieved to some

degree because the potential candidate for the position, Ms. Meilleur, did not even know the meaning of the abbreviation QCGN, the Quebec Community Groups Network, a Quebec association of English-speaking residents.

I think it can be said that this was quite uncondusive to the respect of official languages and I think that the people from the QCGN felt aggrieved. Together with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, they even asked to meet the Prime Minister in person. As a consolation prize, they were able to meet with the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Unfortunately, that was not enough. They left that meeting saying that it was the Prime Minister they wanted to meet with.

They did not get the response they wanted, as they put pressure on our committee and particularly on my NDP colleague from Drummond and on us, the Conservative members. They insisted that we table a motion, which was done by my NDP colleague, to ensure that the committee would do everything in its power to have the Prime Minister meet with those groups.

We, the Conservative members, proposed an amendment to the NDP motion and it was rejected. Before the controversy ended, the committee members from the government were also prepared to reject the motion, which was entirely inoffensive for the government members, as it simply repeated what had been said previously.

ROYAL ASSENT

•(1615)
[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

June 19, 2017

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate chamber today, the 19th day of June, 2017 at 7 p.m., for the purpose of giving Royal Assent to certain bills of law.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wallace
Secretary to the Governor General

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss the Standing Committee on Official Languages' report on the Translation Bureau.

Royal Assent

Before I get into the substance of my speech, I would like to remind the House why this report was needed. Although I am very pleased to hear my Conservative Party colleague heap praise on official languages, for the past 10 years this was not the case. In fact, the reason we began an in-depth study of the situation at the Translation Bureau was because of the previous government's cuts to the Translation Bureau and official languages.

The committee tabled a unanimous report. I congratulate my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. However I must remind the House that it was because of deep, even harmful cuts to the Translation Bureau that we had to urgently undertake this study.

The previous government had asked the team to create software called "Portage". It was supposed to translate all documents for us. The Conservatives believed that with this tool, the Translation Bureau's services could be completely eliminated. We were told that the Translation Bureau used to have about 1000 employees. However, under Mr. Harper's reign, this number shrank to 400. Official languages were not at all a priority, and the two official languages were not even respected in the House.

During the exhaustive study we conducted together, it became obvious that official languages had reached a very serious point in the House because the Translation Bureau had been undermined. Services were not respected. We, both in opposition and the party in power, met with people from the Translation Bureau. We listened to them and heard their suggestions because the Bureau's survival was in crisis. I would even say that it was seriously compromised.

That is why I was proud when the Minister of Public Services and Procurement rose in the House on this matter and came to the Standing Committee on Official Languages to speak to us about it. There was no question of continuing what had been done under the previous Harper government, but rather of reinvesting in the Translation Bureau. In view of that reinvestment, we followed the committee's recommendations quite closely: we hired a new CEO; we created a new chief quality officer; and we agreed to hire 50 students a year over the next five years. That was one of our priorities. In fact, as I mentioned, the survival of the Bureau was threatened.

People around the world can see the quality of the work that Canada's Translation Bureau does for the federal government. Students could not really continue their studies in translation. There was no longer a place to get this essential training. As a result, things came to the point where young people were no longer taking this essential training. It was a priority for us to ensure that these young people were well trained and could continue the Translation Bureau's important work.

In addition, as I mentioned a little earlier, under the former government, the Portage tool was really aimed at eliminating the Bureau because a software program was now going to do everything. Based on our studies and all the questions we asked our witnesses, we found that, because of the errors or mistakes the software made, it was not a translation tool, but rather a comprehension tool. What was quite clear, and this is very important, is that Portage was a comprehension tool and not a translation tool.

Thanks to the efforts we have all made, the committee has submitted a substantive report. I am very pleased that the government has listened. It has put the recommendations in place, which means that the future of the Translation Bureau is no longer threatened. We will continue to reinvest in official languages, since official languages are very important for us, and we must ensure that we are reinvesting in the quality of translation on Parliament Hill, for everyone's sake. It is very important.

• (1620)

[English]

In a few words, under the Harper government, the Translation Bureau had been decimated. It had been brought to the point where it had gone from 1,000 employees to fewer than 400 employees. It was not a priority at all. That was the way the Harper government was going to balance the budget—on the back of official languages. That is why I am very happy that the committee came together to ensure that the government understood that reinvesting in official languages and the Translation Bureau was essential. That is what we did. We all came together to make sure this reinvestment was a priority.

The government listened. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement came before the committee and explained the reinvestments. She read the report and listened to the following recommendations: that we hire a new CEO, which the government has done; that a new position of chief quality officer be created, which has been done; and that more than 50 students be hired per year over the next five years, which was essential to the longevity of the Translation Bureau, and to ensuring the quality of the services that we offer. Because of all the cutbacks, there had been no young students brought in at all. Therefore, it was questionable where we were going and whether we could ensure the proper training of these young students. Canada is looked upon as one of the leaders in the world with respect to translation. Other countries look to us to see what we are doing and how we are investing in official languages, and they were questioning our commitment due to the cutbacks over the Harper years. I am glad to say that our government is committed to this. That was clear in its answer with respect to this report, and because of that we have reinvested fully in the Translation Bureau.

The Harper government invested a lot of money to cut positions. It wanted to cut human resources and replace it with a computer program. A computer program would replace the quality of the great men and women who work at the Translation Bureau. What that did was reduce the credibility of what it was doing because it had a lot fewer human resources to complete the work. It was quite clear from the committee study that this computer program would not do the job the government had intended it to do. It was clear that this was not a translation program but more of a program to understand what needed to be translated. Therefore, it was not meant to be used publicly but to be used internally because of that.

Royal Assent

I want to reiterate the importance of official languages to this government, as well as the investments we have undertaken in the Translation Bureau to re-energize it and make sure it will be maintained at the highest quality possible. However, it will take a while. Why? It is because of the cutbacks under the Harper government. That is why we are investing heavily and bringing people back on board, because we listened. We listened to the concerns of the people on Parliament Hill. We ensured that we maintained the quality and the capacity of official languages via the Translation Bureau. It makes our job on Parliament Hill so much easier. That goes to the essence of what Canada is, a bilingual country. Therefore, it is essential that we reinvest in the Translation Bureau to ensure the quality of what those men and women are doing for us. That is why I am so proud that the government listened to the report and has reinvested in the Translation Bureau. I am proud of the work that we, the members of the committee, have done together to create this great report to reinvest in official languages in Canada.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to set the record straight. In committee, we heard all sorts of witnesses and experts about the Translation Bureau. We came to the conclusion that the Portage software was supposed to assist, not translate. Everyone realized that rather quickly.

This tool was not created to replace interpreters. From the start, it was agreed that the software was created to support them. It is a working tool. Since parliamentary language is highly specialized, this tool was not intended to replace interpreters or translators, but instead help them so they did not have to use Google Translate, for instance, which is what ordinary people use. It was shown to us rather quickly that this could not happen.

Does my colleague agree? He must appreciate that it was introduced to help translators and interpreters.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I partly agree. I agree with him that the Portage software is a comprehension tool. It features a corpus of data. When it was created, it was intended to assist translators.

When a government employee used Google Translate to translate a sentence or paragraph, it became public. This was very worrisome, because potentially secret or very sensitive information could then become public. It quickly became apparent that what was needed was a specific internal tool created for the government, by the government.

However, we learned in committee that the Bureau had been decimated over the years and that there was some fear about the use of this tool. There were concerns that the purpose was to replace professionals in the public service.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Sudbury for his speech and his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Ordinarily, we are quite effective at protecting the Official Languages Act and ensuring the vitality of official language communities everywhere in Canada.

The recent partisan appointment of Ms. Meilleur caused major problems for us. Sadly, the crisis continues on again this week. I asked the Minister of Heritage what she intended to do, given that the term of the acting commissioner of official languages was ending on Saturday, as she was very well aware. She told me that we would know when the time came.

The problem is that it is now Monday and we have had no commissioner since Saturday. Commissioners are not accountable to the government; they are accountable to all parliamentarians in Parliament.

My rights and my colleagues' rights have therefore been violated, because we do not know whom to approach if we need to seek assistance from an official languages commissioner. The report said there was a lack of leadership and people did not know whom to approach. Unfortunately, the first recommendation has not been implemented. It was that the Translation Bureau be given responsibility so there would be a leader in the area of official languages. In fact, there is no chief quality officer, since the position has yet to be filled.

• (1630)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, clearly official languages are a priority for the government. I have full confidence in the Minister of Canadian Heritage when it comes to official languages, which are part of her mandate. She is responsible for ensuring continuity and making sure that everything gets back to normal thanks to our investments. That is not something that can happen overnight. There have been significant investments in human resources and the positions that should be filled shortly. I am satisfied that this will happen in the very near future.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sudbury for his excellent speech.

We are demonstrating leadership. Let us recall that the former Conservative government refused to believe in the existence of bilingual judges. In fact, it told us that it was impossible to find a bilingual judge in Newfoundland and Labrador, but we found one.

In terms of the roadmap, budgets were frozen for over 50 years, which has had a harmful effect on communities, particularly francophone communities outside Quebec. We have committed to holding consultations with all francophone communities outside Quebec.

With respect to the recommendations concerning the Translation Bureau, what recommendations were made and which ones have been adopted by our government?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, several recommendations have been adopted and several of them have already been implemented.

First of all, a CEO has already been hired. A chief quality officer will now have to be hired, but that will be up to senior management, obviously. Furthermore, hiring 50 students a year for the next five years is very important, since this measure is intended to ensure the sustainability and quality of the Bureau.

Royal Assent

These are just some of the recommendations that have been made and have already been implemented in a timely fashion. Nothing like this ever happened in 10 years under the Harper regime. Instead, there were repeated cuts.

My colleague also mentioned the bilingual Supreme Court justices. This is obviously a priority for our government. We have already appointed bilingual justices. We even reinvested in the court challenges program.

There have been many advances in official languages in the 18 months since our government came to power, while absolutely nothing positive happened in the last 10 years under the Harper regime.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of listening to my colleague's remarks on the massive new investments that the Liberals have made. He began by providing an exhaustive list of them. These massive investments total \$25 billion, and it is our children and grandchildren who will have to pay for them. My colleague seemed to be proud of that.

I would like him to explain to me how our children are going to pay for these massive investments.

● (1635)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has proven something beyond reasonable doubt: investing in official languages was far from a priority for the former Harper government. Our priority is to ensure the sustainability of Canada's official languages by making major investments.

Is Canada a truly bilingual country, yes or no? Under the previous government, that was not the case. The official languages were not at all respected. That government kept making cuts. For us, official languages are a priority, and our investments prove it.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today.

I thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for talking about this report, because it is very important. It is one of the first reports we prepared at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, one of the first ones we worked on together.

We were hoping to reduce partisanship on the committee and to work together to ensure that the Official Languages Act is respected and that the vitality of all our fine official language communities is maintained and improved across the country. I visited some of these communities in Alberta and British Columbia. On the weekend, I went to Acadia and met with stakeholders in education, health, and arts and culture.

I say all of this to show that the francophone and official language minority communities, including anglophone communities, like the many wonderful anglophone towns in my riding, need our support so they can remain healthy. Our country is built on bilingualism, which in turn is supported by official language communities. We must therefore ensure that those communities are always at the heart of our considerations.

When we did our study on the Translation Bureau, we asked ourselves what its role was. I would like to take a moment to

congratulate and thank all the interpreters, translators and terminologists, those experts who work at the Translation Bureau and who do an excellent job. They not only allow us to have texts in both official languages, but also to have quality, accurate texts, as well as accurate interpretations that allow us to do rigorous work. This is extremely important.

We heard from witnesses who explained the importance of translation and linguistic duality. Among others, I would like to quote Mr. Delisle, who said:

We all know that a lot of translation goes on in Canada. Translation is part of this country's DNA, even though many Canadians consider it to be a necessary evil of Confederation. The same could be said of official bilingualism because translation and bilingualism go hand in hand. Translation is not a by-product of bilingualism; it is a manifestation of bilingualism.

I have here another important quote about the role of bilingualism and translation in Canada. Mr. Doucet stated:

The translator plays a very important role for unilingual people, bilingual people, and for the Canadian public as a whole. People can rest assured that the texts they receive are of very high quality.

We cannot expect a translation that has been hastily thrown together to be a text for the ages that can be used in law, in committee, or as a law that will be interpreted by legal experts. Those texts need to be written by experts, qualified terminologists with a lot of expertise.

There is a problem at the Translation Bureau in that regard, and it is not going away, contrary to what the Liberals are saying. It is true that the Liberals have begun to reinvest in the Translation Bureau. However, as they are reinvesting, they are continuing to go forward with the planned cuts.

The situation is partly good and partly bad, but mostly bad. In 2011-12, the Translation Bureau had 600 translators, and now it has less than 500. It is the same thing for translator-language advisors. There were 347, but we lost about a hundred.

● (1640)

We are going to lose 150 more in the next few years and only a few dozen a year will be hired. If we lose 100 and hire 20, the net outcome is not positive; it is negative. The problem is that the ability of the Translation Bureau to do excellent work is continuing to atrophy and be diminished. At one point, the morale of the troops at the Translation Bureau hit rock bottom. The union leaders came to see us and explained how badly things were going at the Translation Bureau.

I cannot seem to find the quote, but what came through loud and clear was that there was a major problem at the Translation Bureau.

The Translation Bureau is an institution whose expertise was recognized internationally. People from a number of countries in the world came here to Canada to learn about the quality of the Translation Bureau, to get a sense of its expertise, and to learn from how things were done here.

Royal Assent

Unfortunately, over the past several years, all that expertise has haemorrhaged out of the bureau. It is no longer there. Now, we no longer have that expertise or the international reputation we once had. We need to reinvest in order to regain that pride and base our country on bilingualism and, of course, on the two official languages.

When we talk about bilingualism and official languages, we always neglect the First Nations. I would like to digress for a moment. We must never forget that the First Nations are central to our country. I think we must always remember that and uphold it. Even though we have an Official Languages Act, we must never forget the First Nations. I know that a Liberal colleague said he would like to be able to speak in the language of his nation. That should be a right that is absolutely recognized here in the House of Commons. I would even say it is a shame that it cannot be done in the House of Commons. We must respect the First Nations. They are the ones who built this country. I hope we will be able to have speeches in the languages of our colleagues. In my party, there are colleagues of aboriginal origin who speak their mother tongue. I hope we will be able to hear them speak it one day, as I also hope to hear their speeches simultaneously interpreted.

That was a digression, but I felt it was important. It is really important for us. I am the official languages critic, but it is still important to me that aboriginal languages be recognized and ultimately promoted. We have a lot of work to do in that regard.

I would like to come back to official languages. The first recommendation that everyone agreed on was:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada mandate an existing federal authority to ensure that the Official Languages Act is properly implemented with regard to such aspects as the Translation Bureau.

The committee came to that conclusion. It was not just me; it was the entire committee. This is the part that everyone signed. It was not the supplementary report that I subsequently made—because I made one on the record. This is the section that everyone signed, the Liberals and the Conservatives. It says here that there is a leadership problem when it comes to official languages. I have asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage about it on several occasions. I asked her how it is that there are still problems at Parks Canada regarding access in both official languages and the hiring of bilingual guides.

The acting official languages commissioner visited us last week, and she told us that of the nine recommendations in her last report, only two had been implemented by Parks Canada. Two recommendations out of nine is not even close. She brought it up again in her last report to indicate that this needs work.

When I ask the minister questions about this, she tells me that I need to ask the Minister of Environment because a horizontal approach is used, and there is no “boss” when it comes to official languages. Each person has their own leadership. Things do not work like that. We need someone strong enough to really turn up the heat whenever things are not moving along, someone that could say that we need to get to work at Parks Canada because the current approach just does not work.

• (1645)

It has gotten to the point where, when we tell the Minister of Canadian Heritage that things are not working at Parks Canada and

ask what is happening, she tells us to ask the Minister of the Environment, who is responsible for Parks Canada. That is not leadership. That is why this recommendation was made.

It is the same thing with the Translation Bureau. The Translation Bureau is not within the purview of Canadian Heritage. It is within the purview of Public Services and Procurement Canada. I am not saying that the minister does not know official languages, but she has so many things to take care of. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement does not have time to deal with official languages. It took several months before she had time to testify in committee. She did not know what to do with the Translation Bureau file and so she sent the CEO to testify in committee. However, the CEO is not the minister. She is not accountable to Parliament. We had been asking the minister to testify in committee for a long time. She is very nice and very responsible, but she has a lot on her plate. She does not have time to deal with official languages. As I said, the Translation Bureau is about more than just translation. It plays an important part in our Canadian identity.

We recommended that Canadian Heritage or the Treasury Board show some leadership and call out those who are not meeting their obligations. Unfortunately, that recommendation was not followed.

The situation is the same when it comes to hiring. However, before we talk about hiring, I would like to say some more about leadership. We saw leadership today. Last week, the Minister of Canadian Heritage appeared before the committee. I asked her whether she knew that the acting commissioner’s term was ending four days later, on June 17, which was last Saturday. She replied that she knew it. I asked her when we would have news about the next process. I also asked her whether the acting commissioner’s term would be renewed. She replied that we would get the information in due course. I said that it was in four days, which was very soon. I wanted to know when we would get the information. She told me we would get the information in due course. I asked her not to forget that it was soon. While we wait, we are in a state of insecurity, because we do not know what is happening. She again told me we would get the information in due course.

In my opinion, it is too late to be saying “in due course”. Since last Saturday, we have had no commissioner of official languages. Today, there is a breach of parliamentary privilege because members no longer know whom to turn to. The government does not want to tell us whom we should refer to. The Minister of Canadian Heritage does not want to tell us who is responsible for presenting reports—who is accountable to parliamentarians when it comes to official languages. She does not want to tell us, and that is a violation of our privileges. It shows a lack of respect for the Official Languages Act and for the official language minority communities throughout Canada.

Royal Assent

I hope the minister will fix the problem immediately. It is too late to be saying “in due course”. That is what we mean by leadership. I cited Parks Canada, but I could have cited immigration. The committee heard from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship last Wednesday. I asked him who in his team was the person responsible for immigration in Canada’s official language minority communities. He said that he was. He is? For heaven’s sake! Someone on the team, someone neutral, said he was taking on a lot of responsibility. That makes no sense. That is an enormous workload. This is extremely important, and, at present, Canada is not meeting its targets for immigration in official language minority communities. This is a major problem. All of the communities in Canada need to be revitalized, and immigrants are not going to our official language minority communities, which are in decline.

• (1650)

There is a problem with the percentage of francophones everywhere in Canada, for example.

When I asked the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship who was in charge of this file, he replied that he was. However, one recommendation in our report is that there be someone in charge. We asked that there be a person who can be identified, who can be asked what they are doing to be accountable to the committee, to improve what is a catastrophic situation at present. One person on the committee said that the minister was taking on a lot of responsibility and he would have to work hard, because there was a lot of work to be done at present in the immigration file.

I would like to come back to the work done on the subject of the Translation Bureau. At present, a lot of things have been announced when it comes to the Translation Bureau, but there are still more to come. For example, my colleague from Sudbury just now spoke of the decision to create the position of chief quality officer. That is all fine and dandy, but that position still needs to be filled. A CEO has been appointed, and that is a good first step. To my knowledge, however, the position of chief quality officer has not yet been filled.

I will not speak at length about the Portage tool, which is an automated translation tool. This software was released without much fanfare. The former CEO, who was present, said it was a tool for translating emails and so that people could exchange short texts between themselves. That is false, as was said just now. When it comes to translating and interpreting, you need professionals. We are not professionals ourselves, we members. Public servants are not language professionals. It takes professionals: terminologists, interpreters, and translators.

We therefore cannot simply leave it in the hands of the average person. People can use this software as a reading tool, and thus a comprehension tool, but we must never forget that if a document is to be used in the long term, the services of translators will be required. We have excellent translators in the Translation Bureau. We have to use those services in order to get high quality documents that will carry the same weight in French and English.

I would like to return to another subject. I know that a Liberal member spoke just now about bilingualism among Supreme Court judges. If the Liberals are serious when it comes to these judges being bilingual, they will vote in favour of a bill that was introduced by Yvon Godin, the former member for Acadie—Bathurst. That

member waged a battle for 15 years for there to finally be legislation on the bilingualism of Supreme Court judges. Unfortunately, the Liberals are now resorting to pretexts for voting down the bill, which will come before us next October.

The Liberals used the excuse that it could be unconstitutional, which is incorrect. All the major constitutional scholars who appeared before the committee over the past weeks and months said that while some requirements were essential, others were not.

One may ask the question: is appointing a unilingual judge one of the essential requirements? Is it part of the essential requirements for appointing a judge? No, it is not an essential requirement to appoint a unilingual judge or a bilingual judge. However, it is necessary and it is an absolutely essential skill for a Supreme Court justice. In fact, as I said earlier, legislation is drafted at the same time, legislation is equal in English and in French, and that is why I am calling on the Liberals to stop their petty games, to stop saying that it is unconstitutional and to vote in favour of this bill.

Once again, I thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, since they produced a very good report. However, the recommendations need to be implemented. In this respect, everyone on the committee, Conservatives, Liberals and I as the New Democrat, did a fine job on this report.

• (1655)

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): What a delight it is, Mr. Speaker, to watch this soap opera on official languages unfold. Honestly, it is always very interesting to hear my colleagues speak about official languages.

As for the report on translation, I heard some very good comments. In fact, one interpreter was delighted about all the work we had done. I am sure that the member recalls people who told us that when we use Google Translate for translations, we lose ownership of our data. That was another reason why we had to ensure that we had solid translation tools.

Earlier, my colleague said that the committee members were neutral, but he was not. I just learned that he was not neutral and that he was partisan. I am shocked to learn that. When the report on the Translation Bureau was prepared, we were all in agreement. I am surprised to learn that he prepared a supplementary report.

Why did you do that?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind the members to address their questions through the Chair and not to other members directly.

The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer that question, because, in fact, we have done very good work, almost from the outset, in a non-partisan manner, and I include myself in that. We have also produced a very good report.

However, it is always possible to add a supplementary touch to any good report. I tabled a supplementary report to highlight not only the importance of the Translation Bureau, but also the need for leadership on official languages. On that point, I will reiterate the examples I mentioned earlier, because they are important.

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For example, when it comes to Parks Canada, how can it be that only two of the nine recommendations were accepted, when this is Canada's 150th anniversary? Entry to all of Canada's parks is free of charge, but we did not do everything in our power to ensure that services are offered in both official languages. That is why we added a supplementary report, because there is no leadership at present.

It is the same thing on the subject of the Translation Bureau. I asked several times to have the Minister of Public Services and Procurement come before the committee to explain the situation. However, she always sent us the CEO, who always wanted to make cuts. They were really not moving in the right direction. That is the problem.

In addition, I recall that we had to request two answers from the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, because the first was not satisfactory. It seems that the minister does not have a lot of time for official languages and has a lot of other fish to fry. That is why we want responsibility to be assigned to an institution that has more leadership when it comes to official languages.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, I received a letter from the Minister of the Environment that was solely in English. It was sent to me shortly after the minister appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, where she once again patted herself on the back, saying that the Liberals were wonderful, they were doing a good job, and they were happy to make sure that everything was going well when it comes to official languages. As she was saying those words, my office received an email from her written solely in English.

As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, and our country is officially bilingual, a minister's office is still sending communications in English only. What does my colleague think about that?

• (1700)

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup for his question, because, in fact, it goes to the heart of the problem we have at present when it comes to official languages.

First, we need a minister responsible for official languages who will demonstrate leadership, who believes in what he or she is doing, and who does not leave official language minority communities by the wayside. Second, we need an official languages watchdog, and that person is called official languages commissioner.

As I mentioned earlier, what we are dealing with here is the fact that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Liberal government wanted to make a partisan appointment. We have all proven that. Everyone saw that, which is why she withdrew her candidacy in the end. She could see that her strategy was not working. The Liberals wanted to make a partisan appointment, perhaps because too many Canadians are filing complaints against the Prime Minister. A number of Ontarians filed complaints against the Prime Minister because he went to Ontario and spoke only English, even though there were people from francophone minority communities who wanted to speak French and hear the answers in French. The Prime Minister said that since they were in Ontario, he would speak only English. Later, he travelled to the Sherbrooke area in the Eastern

Townships, but did not know that there are anglophone communities there, because when he went, he said he would speak only in French since he was in Quebec. He was told that there are anglophone communities in Quebec.

He is supposed to be the Prime Minister of all Canadians, French-speakers and English-speakers alike. It is totally mind-boggling.

I lodged a complaint along with many citizens, because people were shocked. The complaint was received and the government was reprimanded. They were told to implement the recommendations. Maybe the Liberals did not like that and decided to appoint a commissioner who would side with them. Unfortunately, it did not work.

The worst part of all this is that since Saturday, we no longer have a watchdog. This lack of leadership means that we can receive communications from ministers in just one official language, which is unacceptable.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Drummond for his remarks and for the important work he is doing at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I wonder if he can give us an explanation to the best of his knowledge. For some time now, the Liberal government has been making a mess of the official languages file. My colleague from Drummond said it is important not to leave francophone and anglophone minorities out in the cold, but it seems to me the Liberals dropped the ball. The appointment of a new official languages commissioner turned into a total fiasco. Their pick was too partisan for a Senate seat, but suddenly not too partisan to oversee official languages in this country. It was so ridiculous that even she realized it and decided to withdraw her candidacy.

The interim commissioner's mandate ended last week. My colleague from Drummond very kindly informed the minister of this fact, just in case she had not seen it coming. He made her an offer and urged her not to forget because there were just four days to go. Saturday passed, midnight came and went, no commissioner. We now have no official languages commissioner. Can my colleague from Drummond tell me if this is either negligence or incompetence on the Liberals' part?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. Is it incompetence or ignorance? I would say that it is a lack of leadership. That is a good answer, is it not? I strongly believe that it is a lack of leadership. I do not understand what happened because everyone knew what was going on. Everyone knew that the interim commissioner's term was scheduled to end on June 17. It is not true that the minister did not know. She was well aware of that fact. She found me quite tiresome last Wednesday when I reminded her not once, twice, or three times but four times that she should not forget that the interim commissioner's term was ending on Saturday, June 17. I also asked her what her plan was and what she intended to do.

Royal Assent

Unfortunately, we are now in a situation where the government seems to have forgotten that the official languages commissioner is accountable not only to the government but to all of Parliament. When Madeleine Meilleur was appointed, the government forgot that it was supposed to consult the opposition leaders, namely, the leaders of the NDP and the Conservative Party. It says so in the Official Languages Act. Subsection 49(1) stipulates that, before an official languages commissioner can be appointed, the government must consult the opposition leaders. However, we learned in April that someone from the Department of Justice had called Ms. Meilleur.

There has been a lack of leadership in all this.

• (1705)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to take part in this very interesting debate.

I would first like to thank the Conservative member who raised the matter. Honestly, I find that a little ironic. Perhaps my colleague simply wants us to talk more about the areas where the Conservatives had little success for the last 10 years. If that actually is his objective, I would take the opportunity to point out to him the consequences that the cuts have had on minority anglophones and francophones over the last 10 years.

First, I will talk about the court challenges program. The first decision of the Conservative government was to eliminate that program to ensure that minorities could not challenge it and that it could impose its will. That was not at all appreciated by the official language minority communities.

Then the Conservative government took issue with the long form census. They said that it was complicated, too expensive, and of no use, although the data could assist certain people, certain communities, or certain provinces. It was a tool that supported minorities, which the government did not consider to be particularly important. Accordingly, that was set aside.

Then the government turned to the Translation Bureau, another place where it could undermine linguistic duality. It decided to make major cuts, claiming that official documents would have very little long-term value. Once again, official language minority communities found themselves in a mess. That did not matter, though, because the Conservative government did not care much about these communities and said this would continue.

I will go on because the cuts to the official language minority communities in the past 10 years were very significant. I am really pleased that my colleague raised the issue.

Now, let us talk about the roadmap. It was the action plan. I think the only solid plan we had was the Dion plan. It was a true action plan. It included measures and data and provided for investments in communities to ensure their success. However, what did the Conservative government do? It held two rounds of negotiations. The first one took place nine years ago. The Conservative government decided not to increase funding and maintain the status quo for four years, when there was normally an increase of 2% or 3%. In the end, investments in official language minority communities were reduced by 12%. The government said that it was

not serious, because that would be renegotiated in five years. However, five years later, the government again decided to maintain the status quo for another five years.

Did the Conservative government have a vision? Yes, to weaken official language minority communities. Maintaining the status quo for another five years meant another 12% decrease in funding. They therefore provided 30% less funding than what was in the roadmap, an instrument to ensure the prosperity, vitality, and sustainability of our communities.

This is the kind of situation we went through for 10 years. However, we finally have a government that is interested in the issue and wants to make a difference for official language minority communities.

• (1710)

Not only do we need to work on a new action plan, on a new roadmap for official languages, but we also have to correct all the mistakes and ill intentions of the past 10 years.

I am very surprised that my colleague gave me an opportunity to speak to this fundamental issue.

The Conservatives decided to attack the Translation Bureau. They believed that it did not take an expert to work at the Translation Bureau—we can translate well enough; that should be all right; that should do it. They told all sorts of stories. For the House and for the country, there is no more important instrument than the Translation Bureau. We must ensure that official documents are translated perfectly.

As my colleague said earlier, countries from around the world come here to study the effectiveness of the Translation Bureau. What did the Conservatives do? They made cuts. They claimed that expertise was not necessary here or for their party. Instead of developing expertise, they made cuts—one cut, two cuts, 100 cuts. Not only will there be fewer people to do the work, but it was decided to give less work to the experts and to make more cuts. What will we do? We will send documents to firms with less subject matter expertise, and these firms will use terminology that we have never heard of. We will almost need to hire a firm to understand the terminology used by the other firm. That is what it will take. They do not believe that quality is essential. How can we be a centre of excellence if we do not have excellent expertise? It is both astounding and discouraging.

The Portage machine translation software was not about cuts. It was just a strategy to ensure that official language minority communities came out the losers once again. The previous government decided to once again make these communities the losers by creating a software called Portage, thanks to which translators would no longer be needed. Public servants could simply use the software application. They would enter the information they wanted translated into the software and hope that it produced an excellent translation.

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Not one, not two, but hundreds of witnesses had to come and say that this was not a translation tool but a comprehension tool. It is shocking to see what a government that is not interested in and has no desire to help official language minority communities can do. If it is not a priority of that government, it gets ignored, and these communities often get ignored.

● (1715)

The Conservatives do not place a lot of importance on expertise. I would like to draw a little analogy. A few weeks ago, the Pittsburgh Penguins won the Stanley Cup. Congratulations Penguins, and congratulations to the best hockey player in the world, who is, of course, from Nova Scotia: Sidney Crosby. Even Don Cherry, who did not really like him because he is from eastern Canada, is now starting to love him because he is the best, but I digress. Did the Penguins go out and get members of their families or fans to play on their team so that they could win the Stanley Cup? No, they did not. They went and got experts, hockey players who could deliver the goods. That is exactly what we have done for the Translation Bureau. The previous government did not seek out experts, but the current government, the Liberal government did. Why? To make sure that we have the best translations, the best product. Translation is much like our Stanley Cup.

Now, let us talk about how we are going to ensure that our plan for translation is followed. Once again, as a result of the recommendations of witnesses and the great work of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we are going to be able to find a way to do that.

I am beginning to lose my voice, but that is okay. Losing one's voice is not a problem when telling great stories about our government and bad stories about—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. If hon. members were not screaming at each other, I am sure that the hon. member would not be losing his voice. So, please, I would like the member to continue his speech so that we can hear what he has to say.

The hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, once again, they are trying to weaken the minorities, but they did not succeed in the past and they will not succeed in the future.

To ensure that expertise is passed on, this government has made a recommendation that is extremely important. Fifty students will be hired each year for five years; that is a total of 250 young people who will become experts. Will they be chosen just from the University of Ottawa? No, absolutely not. Some of the 50 students will come from the University of Ottawa, while others will come from the Université de Moncton, from Acadia, and from the Université de Montréal in Quebec. We will seek universities to help us train the next generation and ensure we keep the expertise that is essential in this area.

One very important recommendation that I also like is from the President of the Treasury Board. If he were here today, I am sure that he would want to add something. The request is to make it mandatory for government departments to use the services of the real, improved Translation Bureau.

The Translation Bureau will be improved because our government wants to ensure that the quality is going to be there, because it is mandatory. We certainly cannot simply have interpreters whose work is almost accurate. I know my colleague from Drummond could add to my list, because he was also there when the witnesses appeared. It was even difficult to hear how the previous Conservative government was able to slowly cause this destruction over 10 years and wreak all this havoc.

Our government is going to invest \$7.5 million a year to rebuild the Translation Bureau and to ensure that we will have experts who can do the job. Then, we did not just say that we would ask the CEO to ensure quality. We said that the CEO would be responsible for working with his team to build a vision, to hold consultations, and to work with the communities to ensure that we will be the best not only in Canada, but perhaps around the world.

That person therefore has this extremely important task. However, to take it a step further, our party decided to hire a chief officer, or a director if you will, who will be responsible for quality. This clearly shows the government's commitment. It could have simply made the changes without taking an extra step. My Conservative colleague must admit that even the Conservatives, in 10 years of so-called work, never imagined that someone could be responsible for ensuring better quality.

● (1720)

I am baffled. I really like my colleague who sits on the committee. His comments are always interesting and relevant. I want to thank him one more time for giving me the opportunity to make the points that had to be made. The government will do what it takes in the future to ensure the quality of translation in the House and in all the offices.

Real success does not come from cuts, but rather from investment. Our party wants to invest in Canadians, in the departments, and in the communities. That is how we will build a structure that will not only ensure our country's economic development, but also demonstrate that the official languages are essential to our government.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's presentation, but he will have to answer a simple question. After all the money the government is in the process of investing in official languages, all the improvements and all the bells and whistles, how is it that his colleague, the environment minister, sent me a unilingual email in English just last week?

Can you explain that to me?

● (1725)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I think the hon. member failed to address me and directed his comment to his colleague. I would remind hon. members to direct their comments through the Chair, and not directly to their colleagues.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The simplest answer I can give is that he probably opened the wrong file. The letter in French was in the other file.

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The important fact is that our government is taking the steps necessary to ensure success. As a government, not only do we have a vision, but we are also introducing measures to promote progress.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook for his speech.

It is a pleasure for me to work with him, particularly on the recent issue of how rights holders are counted. This is an extremely important issue, to ensure that all the people who may be entitled to instruction in French, everywhere in Canada, are able to obtain it. We have a big problem at present with the census. We worked very hard together. I hope we will succeed in addressing this issue before the next census, because it is very important.

Let us come back to the Translation Bureau. I understand that things have happened in the past. However, my hon. colleague has to understand that it is his party that is in government.

On this issue, for 2017-18, while my colleague's party is in government, it is predicted that 140 translator, interpreter, and terminologist positions will be eliminated by attrition. That is equivalent to 17% of the staff. Obviously, 50 students can be hired, but that will not replace all of the expertise. The 15 translators hired every year are not going to fill that void. That is why there must be investment.

I think my hon. colleague sees very clearly that there is still work to be done. To accomplish that work, we need an official languages commissioner.

I would like my hon. colleague to answer this question: how can it be that the interim commissioner's term was not renewed on Saturday? What happened? Who forgot to call her, and who forgot to make the announcement? What is going on in this government?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am really happy that you raised the entire question of rights holders, because I had forgotten it. I should have added that.

When the census was eliminated, what they did was arrange it so that the data that would respond to paragraph 23(1)(b) and subsection 23(2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which relate to counting students, was no longer collected. That is another problem that we have to raise and for which we have to find solutions. We are going to find them.

Also, regarding hiring, we are in the process of restructuring. We have a new CEO and we will shortly be hiring a new quality chief. After that, there will be development, and we will have the staff and expertise needed to restore the bureau's excellence.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind members to direct their questions to the Chair.

The member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, there are no drawers in my telephone or my computer. Last week, I received an email from the minister in English only, with no attachment. There is no hidden drawer or a drawer underneath, on top or to the side. Emails are the only things exchanged on the Hill.

Obviously, my colleague is taking the matter lightly by saying that I did not find the right drawer. This is not about drawers, but it is extremely important, because the Liberals claim to be an exemplary government. Therefore, if that is the kind of example they set, we have a serious problem, a huge problem.

I will ask my colleague again: after 150 years of history—which we will be celebrating a week from now—how is it that even now this government is unable to send emails from its ministers' offices in both official languages? How can that be?

• (1730)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, the first thing that comes to mind is that because of all the cuts they made, there may not have been someone available to translate it at the time.

We are taking action to fix—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. We have a point of order.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, obviously, my colleague is playing semantics and making completely obsolete assertions. It is incredible that he just said—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): That is debate. The hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, the more serious reply is that I do not know how it all happened, but I can say one thing. It was certainly not intentional, because our government is working on ensuring linguistic duality.

There is a big difference between intentional and unintentional. Intentional is making cuts to the court challenges program, the Translation Bureau and the long form census. Those are intentional. Let us look at what is different. The difference is that our communities have been suffering for 10 years. Lastly, the first thing that the government must do is correct mistakes in order to continue building and ensuring the prosperity, vitality, and sustainability of our communities.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give my hon. colleague one last chance, one last opportunity to answer the question I asked earlier. Whether that was his intention or not, he failed to answer it. I want to know if not appointing a commissioner of official languages and not renewing the interim commissioner's term was intentional or not.

We are presently without an official languages commissioner. The commissioner is not accountable to the government, but to Parliament as a whole. Currently, the rights of all parliamentarians are being violated, because they do not know who is performing this role.

What happened? I would like to hear that from my colleague.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, once again, my colleague sits on the Standing Committee of Official Languages. I always appreciate discussing the matter further with him.

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It is simple to me. If we have not announced a replacement, then that means that the interim is still in place. It is not much more complicated than that. The minister explained it today. For those who listened carefully, she clearly said that there would be an announcement shortly. I am sure that we will have a highly effective commissioner.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the passion with which my colleague from Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook gave his speech. He has certainly roused the House this afternoon.

However, I must say that passion does not necessarily lend credibility to words. I obviously disagree with much of his speech. However, the speech given by my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup was highly relevant, as were the actions taken by my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix in recent weeks. With respect to official languages, our position is very clear. I also salute the work of the member for Drummond. In my view, he was able to make his points.

For all these reasons, all these thanks and the good-natured atmosphere, I seek unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion:

That the House do now proceed to the Orders of the Day.

• (1735)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Everyone agrees? Perfect.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

Some hon. members: Yea.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

YUKON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed from April 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Perth—Wellington has about eight minutes left for questions. Does he want to take them?

Mr. John Nater: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): That is fine. We will resume debate.

The hon. member for North Island—Powell River

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is important for me to let the House know that I will not be nearly as exuberant as the previous speaker, and I apologize for that.

It is important for everybody also to know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Courtenay—Alberni on this very important issue.

Today, I will address Bill C-17, a bill that would amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. As the title suggests, this bill does not directly affect my beautiful riding of North Island—Powell River in B.C. Nonetheless, I am happy to rise today to speak to these amendments for first nations and Yukoners whose voices were lost and opposition eerily ignored in the last Parliament.

Without affecting my riding directly, the matter at hand is a very important example of the behaviour lauded during the Harper years. This legacy reverberated in all ridings across Canada. We should not forget that this approach was alienating and downright contrary to the idea of a nation-to-nation relationship.

As the Yukon NDP leader Liz Hanson said, in a public letter:

What we need, what is sorely missing, is a willingness to engage in an open and honest manner. We need a relationship built on dialogue and respect, rather than on lawsuits and secret negotiations.

We are here today to repeal the most damaging clauses in Harper's Bill S-6.

In 1993, after 20 years of discussions, the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Yukon reached an agreement concerning the management of land and resources in Yukon and the settlement of land claims. Chapter 12 of this agreement called for the establishment of federal development assessment legislation. This obligation was fulfilled in 2003 with the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act.

The five-year review of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act was completed in March 2012. Due to a disagreement over the recommendations, the review was never made public. The amendments were developed through a secretive process, yet at the end of it came Bill S-6, which unilaterally rewrote the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. Bill S-6 imposed time limits on the review process. It implemented changes to allow the minister to give binding policy direction to the board overseeing the environmental and socio-economic assessment process. Bill S-6 provided a delegation of authority that allows the minister to delegate any or all of a federal minister's powers, duties, or functions to the Yukon government, and it also changed the requirement for additional assessments to only where the project has been significantly changed.

New Democrats have been leading the fight against these harmful provisions unilaterally imposed by the Harper Conservatives to dismantle the environmental and socio-economic assessment process. This process was developed in Yukon, by Yukoners, for Yukon, and the Harper government imposed these changes without consultation. Like many of Stephen Harper's agendas, this fell into the hands of the courts. On October 14, 2015, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, and the Teslin Tlingit Council took these legislative changes to the Supreme Court of Yukon. Their case states that these changes are inconsistent with their final land claim agreements.

Grand Chief Ruth Massie stated:

It is very unfortunate that Yukon First Nations are forced to bring this matter to the courts. But after numerous overtures to the Harper Government resulting in no compromise or real effort to accommodate First Nations' interests, Yukon First Nations are left with no choice but to defend our rights and established treaty processes. This Petition has broad based support, but we hope the case won't have to go the distance once a friendlier federal government assumes power in the coming weeks.

● (1740)

Some will see this dismantling of the Harper legislative agenda by the courts as judicial activism, but I caution members to acknowledge the reason we are here. Bill S-6 represented a complete lack of co-operation. It was developed without adequate consultation with Yukon first nations and the residents of Yukon, and it was not supported by the majority of them. Moreover, many provisions in the review were not addressed during the review the government unilaterally imposed on the system.

Forty years of discussion have resulted in a unique relationship between first nations, Yukon, and Canada. The steps of Bill S-6 were an example of the realities. When one bullies one's way through, this does not lead to relationship building.

In addition to the provisions in the bill, the Liberal government must reverse the Harper government's unilateral imposition of a new fiscal agreement on first nations in the Yukon. Not directly associated with any provisions within Bill C-17, two weeks before the writ was dropped the Harper government unilaterally imposed a new fiscal agreement on comprehensive land claim agreements, including first nations in the Yukon. This new approach was produced and adopted behind closed doors with no meaningful consultation. It undermines these treaties and cannot be implemented without breaching these agreements.

It is the opposite of a nation-to-nation approach. In November 2015, the Land Claims Agreement Coalition, which includes first nations in the Yukon, wrote the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs requesting the immediate suspension of the previous government's fiscal approach as it was incompatible with their treaties. Too often we have seen this top-down approach failing indigenous communities across Canada.

The Harper government systematically weakened environmental protection legislation with no public consultation and little parliamentary oversight. Since coming to power, the Liberal government has done little to reverse these very important changes. Sadly, the Liberals are also still using Stephen Harper's inadequate targets that will not allow us anywhere close to meeting our international commitments, and nothing in their plan does anything

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to address this ever-growing, gaping problem. We have seen Liberal and Conservative governments repeatedly make international commitments and then fall very short of following through, and so far the current government looks no different.

New Democrats will be raising the continued refusal of the government to fix the National Energy Board review process, as the Liberals committed to in the last election. It is important that all energy projects be subject to a credible and thorough environmental assessment that allows for public participation, respects indigenous rights, and considers the impacts of value-added jobs.

New Democrats are willing partners to work with the Liberal government to roll back the damage from the Harper Conservatives, but New Democrats also know that we must do better with indigenous people in Canada, that merely rolling back these damaging changes is one step, but it is not enough, and that is where the Liberal government has continued to fall short.

I look forward to seeing some positive movements in the future, and I will continue to do my work in this House to make sure that happens.

● (1745)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her very eloquent defence of YESAA. I cannot fault anything she said on YESAA, so I will not ask a question but allow her to wax more eloquent on the bill.

I just want to say something for opposition members, just in case they try to say that we are rolling back everything they did and nothing was accomplished with that five years of review. There were 72 recommendations that were actually negotiated, the parties agreed to, and were implemented, either legislatively or some as policy recommendations. That was achieved, but what the member spoke so eloquently about was the four major things that were thrown in at the last moment, on which Yukoners and first nations were not consulted. They were in contravention of the spirit and probably the law of their treaty.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the comment and for his hard work on this file.

One of the things we saw clearly here was a model of how we can move forward in creating a true nation-to-nation relationship, and how harmful it is when areas and communities work together to create a solution that will work, where we can really track how things are interconnected and how important it is that it be supported, but what we did see, unfortunately, was a total lack of consultation from the previous government, something that tore things apart but could have been so much more positive.

I am very happy we are doing this work in this House. I hope to see the next steps continue, and I do have to say that I hope the commitment for a nation-to-nation relationship that the current government has made begins to flourish more. I would like to see some glowing examples of that in the near future.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, we tried every way we could in debate to stop the erosion of the negotiated agreements for protections in Yukon.

Government Orders

I also want to pay tribute to former member of Parliament Dennis Bevington, who is no longer in this House. He was the NDP member for Western Arctic. In the absence of the government member at the time, the member for Yukon, who was a Conservative, we did not have a spirited defence from someone from the north other than Dennis Bevington. I wanted to thank him for his work on it.

I want to pick up on some of the other examples my colleague from North Island—Powell River used of environmental laws being dismantled and devastated by the Harper administration. I may have misunderstood something she said, so I want to follow up on it.

My colleague mentioned that she thought it was important for the National Energy Board review process to be reformed. We now have two expert panels, one on the National Energy Board and one on environmental assessment, both of which were commissioned by the current Liberal administration. Both of them recommend what I forcefully recommend, which is that the National Energy Board should never again be entrusted with any review processes. The environmental assessment process does not belong before the National Energy Board.

I would like the member to clarify if she agrees that we should never again see a project put before the National Energy Board for an environmental review.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I remember knocking on the door of an elderly man who lives in Campbell River in my riding, overlooking the beautiful ocean and mountains. What he said had a profound impact on me.

He told me he had been living in the same house for 60 years and had seen, over 20 and 40 and 60 years, tremendous changes to the environment, and that these changes scared him. He has children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He said the environment we live in has to be at the very foundation of every decision we make, because it is changing so quickly.

I agree with my hon. colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands that we cannot ever underestimate the power of what is happening to our environment. I hope all of these processes are reviewed and renewed in a new way that means we move forward toward providing a future for our children and our grandchildren. We in the House can do nothing less.

• (1750)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am tabling a supplementary response to Question No. 1025 and the government response to Question No. 1027.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for North Island—Powell River for her speech on Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, and I want to thank the hon. member for Yukon for his hard work on this matter and for his leadership.

We are neighbours. As a British Columbian, I feel very closely connected to Yukon. We share many important values around respect for the environment. Trying to find balance with the environment and the economy is very important to both of us in our province and territory, as well as trying to find balance in working with indigenous

people on a nation-to-nation basis and trying to move forward from the wrongs and policies of the past.

The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, YESAA, was an opportunity for us to move forward. It implemented the environmental assessment framework set out in the Yukon umbrella agreement. That agreement, which Yukoners worked so hard to get, was a multi-faceted stakeholder agreement led by indigenous people with government. In June 2015, the Harper government passed Bill S-6, amending YESAA. This bill was opposed by the NDP in Yukon, so we share those values.

The opposition was based on four changes to YESAA that the Yukon first nations opposed.

First, time limits were imposed on the review process. I cannot understand why we would put a time limit on looking at something that is going to have an impact on people for generations to come, for hundreds and hundreds of years. Where I live, the indigenous people like to look at the economy and look at a forecast and a plan of what it is going to look like for the next 500 years, not the next five years. It is very important to understand that this is a very in-depth process, especially when development in the north has left environmental damage and a legacy of cleanups impacting the local people.

Second, changes were implemented to allow the minister to give binding policy direction to the board overseeing the environmental and socio-economic assessment process.

Third, the bill provided a delegation of authority that allows the minister to delegate any or all of the federal minister's powers, duties, or functions to the Yukon government and change the requirement for additional assessments to only where the project has been significantly changed.

We led the fight against these changes being unilaterally imposed by the Harper regime and we have fought to reverse them since the passage of Bill S-6. On October 14, 2015, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, and the Teslin Tlingit Council took these legislative changes to the Supreme Court of Yukon. Their case says these changes are inconsistent with their final land agreements. They have agreed to put the litigation on hold to see if Parliament will pass this bill to roll back these changes.

We support this bill for this very reason. We want to get these cases out of court and work on moving forward together. Unfortunately, these changes did exactly the opposite. They put confrontation at the front of this.

Bill C-17 proposes to remove these four changes that were unilaterally imposed by the Harper government. We have been leading the fight against these harmful provisions, which were aimed at dismantling the environmental and socio-economic assessment process in Yukon. This process was developed in Yukon, by Yukoners, for Yukon, and the Harper government imposed these changes without consultation with Yukon first nations.

Government Orders

We are willing partners in working with the Liberal government to roll back the damage from the Harper Conservatives, but New Democrats know we must do more for indigenous peoples in Canada than merely roll back these damaging changes, and that is where the Liberal government has continued to fall short.

We are still seeing indigenous people in court. In my riding, the Nuu-chah-nulth are still in court regarding their right to catch and sell fish. They won. In the Supreme Court of Canada, the case was thrown out twice in support of the Nuu-chah-nulth and their right to catch and sell fish, yet the government is still dragging it out.

• (1755)

The Huu-ay-aht won a case in the rights tribunal, and the government has also now challenged that case, so we need to do more. We are calling on the present government to stop fighting indigenous people in court.

In addition to the provisions in this bill, the Liberal government must reverse the Harper government's unilateral imposition of a new fiscal agreement on the first nations in Yukon.

In terms of some context or background, YESAA was established in 2003 in fulfillment of an obligation in the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement. In October 2007, the five-year review of YESAA was initiated, and it was completed in 2012. Due to a disagreement over the recommendations, the review was never made public. The amendments were developed through a secretive process.

Bill S-6 unilaterally rewrote the Yukon's environmental and socio-economic evaluation system. This system was the product of the Umbrella Final Agreement, which settled most of the first nations' land claims in the territory. YESAA is seen by most residents of the territory as a made-in-Yukon solution to the unique environmental and social circumstances of the territory, while the changes proposed in Bill S-6 were seen as being imposed from the outside to satisfy southern resource development companies.

The New Democrats opposed Bill S-6 because it was developed without adequate consultation with Yukon first nations and the residents of the Yukon. It was not supported by the majority of them.

Yukon first nations took these changes to the Yukon Supreme Court. On October 14, 2015, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, and the Teslin Tlingit Council took these legislative changes to the Supreme Court of Yukon. Their case states that these changes are inconsistent with the final land claim agreements. They have agreed to put the litigation on hold, as I stated earlier, to see if Parliament will pass this bill and roll back these changes.

As we know, Bill C-17 proposes to remove the four changes that I discussed earlier.

We support this bill. A few people have spoken about the situation, and I would like to mention some. In her testimony before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on February 25, 2016, Grand Chief Ruth Massie, from the Council of Yukon First Nations, stated:

You're right. This fiscal policy is being imposed. We have not accepted it because of the language in our agreement. How is it going to affect us if it goes forward? We

have no choice but to defend our agreements. That means going back to court because that's not what the provisions in our agreements say.

That is when she is referencing Bill S-6. I could read quotes all day from leaders from the Yukon in support of rolling back these changes.

We know that in this agreement, the Harper government systematically weakened environmental protection legislation, with no public consultation and little parliamentary oversight. Since coming to power, the Liberal government has not done enough to systematically reverse these changes, but we are very happy to see this as a step forward.

I congratulate the member for Yukon again for moving this forward and for working hard so that we can do what we need to do. We need to ensure that laws changing the implementation of land claim agreements can only be made with full and active consultation with and participation of first nation governments. We need to understand that YESAA is a made-in-Yukon environmental assessment process, so any changes to it must only be done with broad public consultation and participation.

The NDP has led the fight against these changes and to support YESAA because we understand they diminished the rights won by Yukoners through the devolution process.

Again, we support this bill. We are excited to see this opportunity for us to roll back these changes and for the people of Yukon in order to move forward.

• (1800)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the previous speaker's vigorous defence. As I know he has more to say, I will not ask a question so he can finish his defence of the bill. However, I did want to make a comment on timelines from the previous debate.

First, the timelines that were in this bill actually were not really necessary, in the sense that the vast majority, if not all, of the projects were meeting and exceeding those timelines anyway.

Some who do not understand the process would suggest there are no timelines. There are timelines. They are the policy of the board. They have been gazetted. It is just that those timelines are made in Yukon. The Conservatives have spoken before about letting local people make the decisions. The present system allows the local people, the policy of the board, to make these timelines that exist today.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, New Democrats are very happy that the bill would roll back changes, so we can continue to move forward with the agreements that will be set up in Yukon, the long-term agreements that everyone worked very hard to accomplish.

Government Orders

I think this is a first step in avoiding litigation in court with indigenous peoples. I would like Liberals to take this approach with the people in my riding, the Nuu-chah-nulth, the Huu-ay-aht, and other indigenous people in this country, go to the table, stop fighting indigenous people in court, and create a real nation-to-nation dialogue that is based on a foundation of consultation, accommodation, and supporting UNDRIP.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague made a specific point. He asked why we would want timelines for projects, because, after all, the projects are important. That is an interesting question, but the answer is also fairly obvious, which is that any time decisions need to be made, there should be a fair process for evaluating the decision by looking at the evidence. If there is an infinite process with no timeline to it, then, effectively, the decision will always be no. If there is no mechanism for saying the adjudication has happened and it is now time to make a decision, effectively, that is an anti-development decision and it will go on infinitely. I suspect that may explain why some parties in the House are opposed to timelines, because they always want the decision to be no when it comes to development.

What does the member think about my reasoning, that if we are going to have a fair process that involves a decision, sometimes yes, sometimes no, then we have to a time limit to that adjudication process and it cannot go on forever?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, we all want certainty when it comes to economic development. We want to find the balance to move forward so that we can find ways to grow our economy, protect the environment, and make sure there is a socio-economic benefit to communities where development takes place. That does not mean we have to rush decisions, especially if they are decisions that are not in the best interests of people locally. When it comes to economic development with indigenous people, they should not be pressured to make a decision on land or territory that they have governed or taken care of for thousands of years. They should not be rushed or forced to make a decision when it might have an impact on future generations. They have an important responsibility to generations from the past, the present, and the future.

New Democrats have a different opinion than the Conservatives on how to work with indigenous people. We seek consent. Consent is the foundation of economic development as we move forward and if we have not achieved consent and indigenous people need more time, they should be able to have more time. We should not be pressuring or forcing local communities to move forward with economic development on a timeline that is set by people from outside their communities, or without having conducted the consultation and accommodation that they so desire.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to stand this evening to talk to Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another act.

I want to note that I have only had the privilege once in my life of going to the Yukon, and what an incredibly beautiful part of our country. As we celebrate Canada's 150th, I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to go up there, to paddle the rivers, or just enjoy

the beautiful history and scenery. It truly is a unique and wonderful part of our country.

I also want to note that as a British Columbian, when I went up there I really did appreciate how the Yukon seemed to have a very good, collaborative process in terms of having solved many of its outstanding land claims issues, having a comprehensive process in place. Contrast that to British Columbia, where we still have a lot of work to do to get to the same place.

It is interesting. I am hearing about four amendments, and I am hearing a lot of process concerns. We did not talk about it quite long enough. However, I am not really hearing good arguments about those four elements.

First, I want to make a special note. This was legislation that was enacted in the last Parliament. It has been in place for a couple of years now. I have not heard of any difficult stories coming out of the Yukon in terms of the way the legislation has been established. There has been unhappiness with elements of it, but I have not heard of any challenges in terms of what it has done to move projects forward.

I have heard of a lot of challenges with the uncertainty of the time frames and the fact that people do not know what the government is going to do. It is important to note that the government actually introduced this piece of legislation over a year ago. I think it was in June 2016. If we look at how much of a priority it is for the government, the legislation was introduced well over a year ago and here we are, in the final stages of 2017, before we rise for the summer, and all of a sudden there is now some kind of urgency to it.

We did not have the first debate in the House on this legislation until April. Again, what the government is trying to do in the final days of Parliament is to get legislation through the House, and through committee with hardly any witnesses and hardly any time. There is not really the opportunity for the due diligence that we are responsible for as parliamentarians.

The government is trying to move it through quickly. In terms of the time management and of its record for moving legislation through Parliament, the government has a strong majority and has moved fewer pieces of legislation forward than Conservatives did in a minority government.

I forgot to note at the start that I will be sharing my time with the member for Foothills. Although I would love to speak for 20 minutes, he has a lot of good things that he would like to say as well.

We have a government that is trying to rush things through at the end of Parliament, because it has actually had a bad time management, parliamentary management system in place. It is spending lots of time debating motions that could have been done through ministerial statements. It has been ineffective in terms of what the government says are priority pieces of legislation with important time frames.

Government Orders

The bill before us is going to do four things in terms of the environmental assessment process. I am going to talk a little about each one. I know there was a discussion for five years around the review of ESA. There was an agreement on 72 elements, and there were four elements that perhaps there was not consensus on. I think having consensus on 72 out of 76 elements is pretty darn good. Any municipal government would be pleased to have kind of consensus, in terms of moving forward.

● (1805)

If we had, in this House, agreement on 72 pieces of legislation out of 76, we would have a pretty darn good record. The fact that perhaps there was not as fulsome a discussion as some groups might have wanted on these few elements, I do not think necessarily means that there has not been an important process and good rationale.

First, with respect to time limits on the review process, I heard my colleague from the NDP say time limits do not matter. Time limits do matter because companies and capital investments travel, and they go where they are wanted. If there is uncertainty, or if they know they are going to have to potentially wait 20 or 30 years before getting a yes or a no on moving a project forward, they are going to take their capital and spend it in other places. Therefore, having certainty around time limits is an important and logical step. It has been done, and has been well received in most of the provinces in the rest of the country.

It is interesting that they are complaining about the time limits, but they say we are meeting those time limits anyway, so we do not need it in the legislation. However, in challenging projects, perhaps people might need a little push in terms of having a time limit. As with many people, when they know a paper is due and they have a time limit, it is easier for them to get the work done than when it is open ended and they can turn in the paper whenever they want.

On the concerns about the time limits, especially when they are meeting them anyway, especially when it is consistent across the country, I will use British Columbia again as an example. There is a start process. They might say it is 18 months, but lots of times they put a halt to the process because there is something they need to deal with. I know that even a process that might have an 18-month time frame from submission to when they are supposed to get an answer can often take three or four years because there are certain elements that can trigger a halt in the process. Therefore, it is really not a good argument to suggest that time limits would be inappropriate in this piece of legislation.

Second, on exemptions from reassessment when an authorization is renewed, unless there is significant change, there can be a very minor change in a project. To suggest that they have to go through a fulsome, robust environmental assessment process is simply red tape, time consuming, and inefficient in terms of dollars. I would suggest a very appropriate insertion that says when there are minor changes they do not have to do a major review. It is not an area that is particularly troublesome, nor do I think in general people should be troubled by that.

Third, regarding the ability for the federal minister to provide binding policy direction, I agree we could have some debate on that. Perhaps that is one area where I could argue on both sides. I will

concede that although one and two are perfectly appropriate, perhaps we could have a discussion on three.

The fourth one is the ability of the federal minister to delegate powers and duties. That is what we are doing across the country. In the provinces, they are saying, "Get out of our business. You live a long way away. Let us take over. Let us be responsible for making our own decisions in our own communities."

It is unfortunate that I had the one-minute warning, because I have lots more to say. On the process, we had full consensus on 72 out of 76 recommendations. We have three that are very rational and reasonable, and one on which perhaps there could have been different decisions. I look forward to any questions.

● (1810)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of comments to make before I ask my question.

Something has happened since the last debate on this.

On May 17, Motion No. 23 was passed unanimously in the Yukon legislature. The motion reads, "supports the efforts of the Government of Canada to restore confidence in Yukon's environmental and socio-economic assessment process through amendments contained in Bill C-17..." The Yukon Conservative Party was also party to that unanimous motion. Therefore, I am not sure why anyone in the House would want to go against the unanimous view of Yukoners.

The member said the timeline was a little rich. If members remember the day the chiefs were here, expecting this relatively routine bill to go through, the Conservatives, through mischief motions, delayed it until we got to this time.

On recommendation 72, the member made a very good point, but a few things were not agreed to at that time. The problem is that four major items were thrown in at the last moment and they were not part of those five years of review.

There is no shame in this, but the member probably did not know that timelines are in place now. As I mentioned previously this afternoon, it is the policy of the board and they have been gazetted, so there is no need to usurp those timelines by Ottawa when it is already put in place locally in the system in place at the moment.

● (1815)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, the member has said that timelines are in place locally and he does not have an issue with it. Why then is he concerned about having it in the actual legislation? That just makes no sense. To enshrine it in legislation is perfectly appropriate.

Government Orders

Again, what I am hearing is a lot of argument against process. The essence of the bill is to remove four items. In fact, we should leave three items in it because it would be better for Yukon. The arguments I am hearing have not convinced me otherwise, that this is an argument about people being unhappy with the process, but not about the implications of the legislation.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a bit confused about the conviction we are hearing. With respect to what we have heard from the Conservatives so far, I am trying to understand how we are helping people if we are encouraging using a court system for a challenge. The status quo is not healthy if we encourage someone to prove us wrong by going to court. Maybe the member can help us understand a bit more some of the objections to what is a healthy process in honouring the real intent through YESAA.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, I have already complimented the very important YESAA process in Yukon. It has done an admirable job and I know it took it a long time to get there. My point is simply that in the House we would never have consensus on 76 recommendations. We have 72 of 76, and that is a very strong method forward, and it is doing excellent work.

As I indicated earlier, what we have here is one area where there might be legitimate concerns and three areas where the concern is that it was in the legislation, but it is not actually what it is stated.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-17.

I was a member of the aboriginal and indigenous affairs committee when we started to finish up the initial bill, which was through the Senate, Bill S-6. I understand concerns were raised. However, I have heard many times in the House today from the other parties about this lack of consultation.

There was a great deal of consultation as we moved through this process. Again, that was highlighted by my colleague's previous comments with the fact that of the 76 elements of the legislation, 72 had strong support and consent. There were four areas that needed to be discussed and were discussed. There was a great deal of consultation. Our committee even travelled to Yukon to meet face-to-face with government officials, industry, and representatives from indigenous communities. It was a process done in partnership with the communities, which is important to note.

I raised some concern with dismantling some of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, YESAA and the precedent the Liberal government was setting. I am very concerned with the future economic development opportunities of the Yukon and other territories if we take some key elements out of YESAA, such as the moratorium on Arctic drilling and the tanker ban off B.C.'s northern coast. Now there is a carbon tax. It seems that limits will be put on communities in Canada's north over and over. They rely heavily on natural resource development and the economic opportunities that brings to those communities. They will be further restricted, not only by taking some of these elements from YESAA, but part of the bill would also add additional bureaucracy and red tape to the approval process.

In my home province of Alberta, more than \$50 billion in capital investment have left the province. A big part of that was the

downturn in oil prices, but we have been through that before. The most significant impact has been the federal carbon tax, provincial carbon tax, and axing the discovery of well tax credit. All of these things are having an impact, and we have seen the devastating effects this has had on Alberta. I fear the next areas to start to feel this and the implications of these Liberal policies will be Yukon and some of these other northern territories.

However, Bill C-17 would change four key areas. I mentioned that we had near consensus on 72 out of 76 elements of YESAA. Now we want to address time limits on the review process; in fact, removing these timelines. My colleague in the New Democratic Party, who I respect a great deal, talked a little about why it was important to remove these timelines. It is because we need to discuss these issues long term. I think he was saying that we were looking at 500 years down the road.

We are not going to attract investment from the energy sector. We would not have large private-sector companies, maybe in partnership with the public sector, municipalities, provinces, and territories. They will not invest in a project if they do not see a clear goal or clear timeline to approval or denial. If they see there are no timelines in place or very limited timelines on the review process, they will not take that chance. They will take their investment dollars and put them in jurisdictions where they know they have a chance to succeed, or at least a very clearly defined process on how to get to that place. They will take their investments, as we see right now, to the United States, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and other countries where they will have a much better ability to get a return on their investment or at least see their project be approved. However, by eliminating those timelines, we will not be making our territory or jurisdiction attractive to capital investment, especially when it comes to the natural resource sector.

• (1820)

When we were in government, looking at Bill S-6 and making these changes to YESSA, we wanted to empower Yukon, the territories and the communities in these jurisdictions to make these decisions for themselves. That was a key element to this. We wanted to ensure Yukon and the communities in Yukon had a level playing field that was comparable to the rest of Canada. We wanted to ensure the regulatory process and the review timelines were the same for Yukon as they were in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario and Atlantic Canada. We wanted to ensure there were no obstacles or detriments to attracting new capital investment to Yukon.

That is one of the reasons why Bill S-6 was so important. It was intended to make the northern regulatory regimes more consistent with other provinces. The key to that was to ensure Yukon would not be at a competitive disadvantage compared to other jurisdictions. We wanted to ensure these reforms also gave northern communities greater control over their future. They would have more impact and more say on what resource development would happen and what economic growth opportunities would be available.

Government Orders

We wanted to ensure there was predictability with these projects. We wanted to ensure there was certainty for proponents, regulators and governments, as well as aboriginal and indigenous communities. When they are making these decisions, we want to ensure they have all the information available to them, including timelines, and predictability. The process of getting those to conclusion is also very important.

The removal of these timelines as part of the review process shows we were introducing unnecessary delays in the approval process. We see the impact that has with other infrastructure projects across Canada when it comes to our energy sector. We want to ensure Yukon has an opportunity for economic development.

A good example of that is when I was at the PDAC conference in Toronto earlier this year. I had an opportunity to meet with stakeholders from the mining industry in the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut. They talked about the importance of the mining industry in those remote northern communities. We also did a mining study at the natural resources committee. Certainly, a very high priority was not only their ability to do business and work with their indigenous communities, but also the importance of having that strict timeline as part of the regulatory review process.

The stakeholders at the PDAC meeting told me that the carbon tax on its own would cost their two companies combined about \$25 million. These projects may not even go ahead because of that tax. How can we have new economic opportunities in these northern and remote communities that need it if private-sector companies do not see a friendly government at the federal level, which wants to embrace these opportunities for the northern communities?

When stakeholders of two major projects in the tens of millions of dollars are now questioning their future, their ability to be successful, and may move out, other companies will follow. When we add the ban on Arctic drilling, the moratorium on tanker traffic off the coast of northern B.C., a carbon tax, and now red tape and bureaucracy to the regulatory regime and review process, they simply will not go ahead. Rather, they will look for other areas that they feel are more business-friendly and more friendly to economic and resource development.

The key there is that Yukon was one of the most attractive territories and jurisdictions in Canada for mining companies and for mining projects and to invest in new opportunities. Yukon very quickly fell down that chart not only in Canada, but around the world because of the regulatory regime in place. Bill S-6 was an attempt to clean that up to ensure Yukon would not be at a competitive disadvantage. We wanted to ensure Yukon remained in that top five as not only a jurisdiction that was welcoming, had willing partners, and offered great opportunities, but also had a regulatory regime in place that allowed these things to happen.

Therefore, Bill C-17 is a step backward with respect to resource development and economic opportunity in Yukon. We have to be extremely concerned about that.

• (1825)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member talked about supporting development in Yukon, and that is exactly what the bill would do.

I want to make a small technical correction for the record to make sure people understand something I did not say very well before. More than 76 items were discussed. Let us put them into part 1 and part 2. In part 2, there were 72 agreed to and implemented, but there were a few more the parties could not agree to, so they were left off the table. Over and above those, four serious things were put in at the last moment, without negotiation, and that was the problem.

I will go back to time limits, and I hope I do not have to say this again. The member spoke very well about wanting to put power in the hands of Yukon. The system has now been set up that way. Very competitive timelines are there, but they are determined locally by the board by what makes sense. They are gazetted. They are in place. I hope if any more Conservative members plan to speak to this, they will correct their speaking notes so I do not have to say it another time.

The member mentioned mining. Let me quote:

The Government of Yukon, self-governing Yukon First Nations, Council of Yukon First Nations and the Yukon Chamber of Mines look forward to seeing Bill C-17 passed, without change, as soon as possible. Your support for the passage of Bill C-17 assures us that the Government of Canada is genuinely committed to reset the relationship between Canada, Yukon and Yukon First Nations.

The member talked about local support and about mining. There is local mining support. A unanimous decision was reached in the Yukon legislature by all parties, including the conservative members.

• (1830)

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I am not sure there was actually a question there, but the member made some good comments. I appreciate my hon. colleague's work on the same question he asks over and over again.

The key is that there was consultation. Our committee went to Yukon. We met with industry, stakeholders, and indigenous communities, not only when it came to the initial 76 elements but also to the four the member referred to. I keep hearing that there was no consultation, that these things were just added and were magically there. That is simply not the case. There was consultation. We had the support of industry.

We are looking at the policies the Liberals are putting in place. It is about adding red tape and adding bureaucracy. I see them going down a road that will ensure that there is no more resource development in Canada, especially in northern and remote communities. We are seeing it in Alberta and the impact it has.

A report came out today that indicated that downtown Calgary now has a vacancy rate of 40%. That would not happen if the federal government was a partner when it came to supporting economic development, and that includes natural resources.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I parenthetically note the economic literature about the situation in Alberta, which is very much a concern to everyone in this place. We want people working. We want all parts of Canada engaged in a healthy economy. The current price of WTI crude oil is 44.74¢. That is not due to government regulations but rather is due to a global oil supply glut. It has nothing to do with climate policies.

I want to direct my colleague to something the member for Yukon just mentioned. I will quote specifically from the letter sent to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and signed by the Premier of the Government of Yukon, Grand Chief Peter Johnston of the Council of Yukon First Nations, and Mike Burke, president of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, in which they urge the House to pass the bill. I will read what they say.

“Our governments and organizations confirm our support for the repeal of these amendments. It is our understanding that Bill C-17 will be brought forward in the House for second reading on March 22, 2017.” Here we are, still debating second reading now. They “look forward to seeing Bill C-17 passed, without change, as soon as possible.”

These are the people who are doing industrial resource development in the Yukon Chamber of Mines.

My colleague's concerns about this legislation and resource development are ill-founded.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I cannot let it go by when the member says that what is going on in Alberta has to do with low oil prices. That is certainly part of it, but to say that it is all of it is simply not the case.

Alberta is my home. I have lived there for most of my life. My friends and neighbours have been impacted by what is going on. Fifty billion dollars in capital does not leave a province because of oil priced at \$45 a barrel. We went through oil at \$20 a barrel and were able to pay off a deficit and the debt.

They are leaving Alberta right now because of federal and provincial government regulations that have made it simply unfriendly and impossible to do business in Alberta. That is what is happening in Alberta.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate tonight on this piece of legislation. We are discussing Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another act. It raises a variety of questions more broadly in our discussion of natural resource development. I will speak about the bill and the different provisions in it as well as about some of the underlying questions and the relationship between those questions and broader issues of resource development.

We have already had some discussion tonight about my province, Alberta, and some of the resource development questions there. A lot of the questions are the same in terms of how we view the kinds of processes that need to be in place when it comes to economic development, where we think the decision-making power should be situated, and how we think these things should unfold.

To start with, in terms of the particulars of the legislation, the bill seeks to repeal a number of sections of the act that deal with time limits for project assessment, the ability of the federal minister to delegate certain powers to the territorial minister, the ability of the federal minister to set binding policy regulations, and an exemption to allow for project renewal if there is clearly no significant change to the project. These provisions of YESAA help to facilitate orderly, relatively efficient discussions, evaluations, and conclusions in terms of the assessment of projects. They reflect the belief of the previous government that we should trust local governments, provincial governments, and territorial governments as much as possible to make decisions that fall within, generally speaking, their own competencies and areas of authority.

These are some of the existing provisions of the legislation the government is seeking to repeal. We oppose this legislation. We think the provisions the government is seeking to repeal actually make good logical sense, and I want to go a little bit into the reasons why.

I will start with the issue of time limits. The bill would repeal sections that provide for legislated time limits for project assessment. There are a range of perspectives in this House on this question. We had a member of the NDP wonder why we would have time limits for project assessment. How does it even, from his perspective, make sense to have those time limits. That is one perspective in the House. We then had a member of the government say that maybe there should be some degree of time limitation, but it should not be defined from the outset. It should be something that can be determined or shifted on a case-by-case basis.

Our view, in this party, is that constructive deliberation requires there to be clear opportunities for the evidence to be presented, then coming out of that process, an opportunity for a determination to be made that reflects that evidence. I think that is intuitively reasonable. Thinking through and coming to a conclusion requires some degree of certainty that at some point, that decision-making process will end and there will be a conclusion, either yes or no. It is not about saying that every project should go ahead. It is about saying that there should be a process by which that decision is made.

For members who maybe are not convinced of this idea that we should have some degree of time limits for energy projects in terms of the adjudication of them, I can maybe make an analogy to our use of House time. This is something we have debated quite a bit in terms of the Standing Orders. We provide for the fact that there are a large number of bills we want to have discussed in this place, and we cannot spend the entire life of a Parliament debating the same bill, because it will make it harder to pass other bills. We have to make difficult decisions about how we use the time in this House. Hopefully, most of the time that happens through agreement among House leaders. If we think about it, we debate substantial, very difficult issues, and we allocate, either by agreement or by the government imposing the allocation. It is quite short compared to the time windows that exist for many of these energy projects.

Government Orders

•(1835)

We spent two or three days discussing the government's euthanasia legislation at second reading. Recently we had the imposition of time allocation on the government's marijuana legislation to send it through to committee. After very little debate, we had the imposition of time allocation on a very expansive transportation regulation bill. These are cases where we had debate in the House of Commons limited to a number of days, even a number of hours.

Conservatives used time allocation occasionally when we were in government. The Liberals use time allocation. The NDP has voted on a number of occasions for time allocation. If members think energy projects should have no time limits, I would ask them to reconcile that contention with what seems to be the accepted view of all major parties in this House that there needs to be some limitation on debate that happens in this place. If members cannot go on to debate questions, broader legislative questions, infinitely, then how does it make sense that we can have an infinite assessment process for energy projects?

Let us be clear, there are individuals, interests, and groups, some of whom may not have a direct connection with the specific projects in place, that have a desire to filibuster energy projects. Any time there is a proposed project, they want to be able to insert themselves in the process and drag that process out as long as possible to prevent that project from moving forward.

In the House of Commons, there are only 338 of us, and in this chamber, we are subject to, generally speaking, certain time limits. There are other mechanisms of limiting debate. However, when we look at project assessments that happen outside this place, there are many different groups or individuals who could come forward and make presentations. There is always the worry that for these projects the assessment could be dragged out so long that effectively it would be a filibuster. Effectively, there would be no opportunity to make an adjudication on the basis of the information and the evidence, because the discussion would just keep going on and on.

I am of the view that there are some projects that should go ahead. If people think that there are projects that should go ahead, then we have to accept that there has to be some mechanism for setting time limits, for having an identification of a process in advance that allows that determination to be made.

I would take the view that the existing provisions of this legislation prescribe time limits, legislated time limits, clear time limits, so that everyone knows what the process is and everyone can have confidence and certainty in that process. There is predictability from the outset, and people can submit the opinions they want to submit. We make sure through that process that everyone has an opportunity to get their opinions on the record but also that a decision will be made at the end of that process. I think having that clarity, that certainty, from the outset is a reasonable way to proceed and to ensure that ultimately, the best decision is made.

I am going to switch to discussing some of the other provisions of this legislation. The existing act talks about the fact that there should not be a repetition of the assessment process if an evaluation has already taken place and the project has not substantially changed.

Along a similar line, this is about saying that there should be an assessment. There should be a process by which a decision is made, but a decision should then be made. It does not make a lot of sense to say that we have to repeat the whole assessment process if what we are actually looking at is a project renewal and there is no significant change to the project. If there is not a substantial change to the project, then why would there be a need to evaluate it again? That is fairly obvious.

From the perspective of fairness in decision-making, a decision is made, and then we proceed with it once all the evidence is gathered and put together.

•(1840)

It is interesting, listening to the other debate in this House, that there are very few politicians who are prepared to say, "We are just against all energy projects". However, we start to wonder, when we look at the accumulation of objections and excuses, if there is actually something else going on. What we hear more and more from those in certain quarters politically is an unwillingness to admit to being, generally speaking, anti-development, but they object to pipelines and to the transportation of energy resources. They want to impose new taxes and tighter regulations on it. They want to avoid having fixed benchmarks in place. They are concerned about defined time limits. They want these assessment processes to be able to go on forever.

As much as those who raise all of these objections may say they are pro-development, when we actually add up the pieces we can identify so many different ways in which these advocacy groups or these political interests are effectively putting up barriers to development without admitting that all they are trying to do is put up barriers to development. However, when they are consistently opposing new requirements that do not really make sense outside of an anti-development framework, then we start to wonder why we cannot just have an honest conversation about whether economic and resource development is going to be beneficial for the regions that we are talking about.

It is clear to me that there should not be repetition of assessment when it is not needed, that project assessment should have a reasonable and clearly defined timeline. For those who say that should not be the case, we have to ask the question, what really is the motivation for that argument? Not, perhaps, for everyone, but if they are opposed to pipelines, they want new taxes for energy resources and they want to make the process more complicated, less predictable, and longer, then they cannot really say at the end of it that they are pro-development because it becomes clear that they are not.

Economic development is so important for job creation in the north and in western Canada, but all across the country we should recognize that there are spinoff economic benefits associated with economic development that benefit the entire country. There are jobs in every province and every region that relate directly or indirectly to energy development. Therefore, all members, regardless of what region of the country they come from, should understand that they have a direct stake as part of one whole Canadian family, but also, given the direct tie-in to every region, they have a stake in supporting policies that are responsive to economic development.

Government Orders

One of the other provisions in this legislation that is repealed is powers around delegating authority. I am very proud of the fact that under the previous Conservative government, we took the position that territories deserved to be able to increase their power and control over their own territory, that territorial governments elected by their people, as the level of government that is closest to the people who are electing it, should be able to make more decisions over the direction and future of what happens in those areas.

Just as we have a federation that is well served by strong provincial governments that can be more responsive in many cases to what is happening in terms of local circumstances than the federal government, we have strong municipalities that can, in many cases, be closer and more responsive to the immediate needs of their communities than other orders of government. We recognize that principle in southern Canada and we should apply it in the same sense in the north.

That was our approach, and it was coming out of a broader philosophical commitment to the principle of subsidiarity. The emphasis on subsidiarity has been a part of the Conservative tradition for as long as I can remember. Decisions that can be made closer to the local level can likely harness the creativity and the connectedness to those issues of more people than if decisions are made far away, where they have people who are not actually directly involved in the circumstances on the ground. When they have decisions that are made by a smaller number of people that are applied across the board, even in cases where they may not apply, they are less likely to have positive outcomes.

● (1845)

If we delegate that authority, if we have as much of that authority expressed at the local level, and responsibility as well, and the power to make decisions and to see the consequences of those decisions, and then have local people respond in local or provincial or territorial elections, we get a more responsive decision-making process, we get more responsive outcomes as that process unfolds.

That is the emphasis on subsidiarity, that kind of philosophical framework that we brought to the discussion of this, and it is one that I think the Liberal government is less interested in. It is trying to impose specific policy direction on provinces, even outside of what is supposed to be federal jurisdiction. I think it is very relevant to our discussion that here we see the government proceeding in that way, with respect to the carbon tax. I think this is the first time we have ever seen a federal government say to the provinces, “You must impose a tax in an area of your jurisdiction and if you don’t, we will impose a province-specific tax on you and then basically the voters in your province will be completely without recourse if they perhaps want to go in a different direction than the rest of the country is going.”

It is unheard that we have a federal government say, “We’re going to have a special tax for Saskatchewan that we’re going to collect in Saskatchewan and not elsewhere.” This has very concerning implications from a federalism perspective. I am sure it would be challenged legally. However, underlying all this is a lack of respect for the particular competencies of provincial governments—provincial governments that may have different priorities, which reflect the different priorities expressed by the voters in their areas,

provincial governments which may have different visions of how to realize the broader policy direction that may be set out.

It is, of course, important that provinces work together, that they have discussions on how to do things that are in our collective interest. I think that voters in every province and every territory are going to push for those kinds of outcomes, those kinds of approaches. However, when the federal government comes in and tries to dictate to provinces, that is where we get into problems.

Again, we took the position, with respect to the approach that the previous Conservative government took to the territories, in general, that strengthening the powers the territories had to make decisions that reflected what the electorate in those territories were looking for, was a better way of proceeding, rather than having the power in the hands of the federal government.

The provisions that we had in place in YESAA gave the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs the ability to delegate certain powers that were provided to them under the act to the territorial minister. This legislation completely takes that power away, and that, of course, raises some questions.

I will now proceed to my next point, which is the changes that the legislation makes with respect to the ability to issue binding policy direction.

YESAA currently provides the ability for them to set policy direction to the board.

Again, I think the board has the responsibility of making determinations based on the immediate evidence but it makes sense that the broad policy would be set at the ministerial level. There is a distinction between assessment and policy. That, I think, respects the proper democratic function of ministers, which is to exercise authority on behalf of the people, and of the board to make independent evidence-based decisions as well. We think that properly reflects the balance that should exist in that case.

Overall, it is evident, if we look at this legislation, there is a broader objection in many quarters of this House to development projects. That is something that we are very concerned about and one of the reasons, among others, why we oppose this legislation.

● (1850)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan being coherent today, especially after we both flew all night to get here today. However, this time I do not agree with his speech.

One of the first Conservative speakers made a very good point. She said there were some process problems. That is the whole issue, from my perspective. If there was a law passed illegally, not in the spirit of the treaties, or against the treaties, it does not matter how good the various things are. There is no use even debating them. Some members are debating the points. If the process was not right the member would be the first to know that, after filibustering on a process point for 16 hours. I am sure if he was a Yukon chief he would be filibustering this for the same reason, the process.

Government Orders

The member has made some great points in favour of the bill. He said territorial governments closest to the people should be able to make more decisions. Not only the territorial government, all the opposition parties just unanimously passed a motion to support this bill. Therefore, if we want them to be closer to the people, live up to what the member said.

That falls in with the philosophy of subsidiarity, to make the decision from the lowest down. The territorial legislature, all the chiefs and their governments have said to pass this as is. We should follow the member's dictates.

Finally, we should not dictate to the provinces and territories. That is what we are taking away, that dictation that happened in these elements with a lack of respect, as he talked about, for competition for the provinces and territories.

That will be enough, because he has made such an eloquent, good reason as to why the Conservatives should support the bill. I will leave it at that.

• (1855)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for his intervention. I wish I had as much time today as I do when I am at PROC to fully develop these points. Maybe there would be less confusion if I did, because the principle of subsidiarity is not that the federal government should pass legislation just because another level of government asks them to. The principle of subsidiarity is delegating practical authority, and therefore the ensuing responsibility for that decision, to orders of government that are closer to the people.

Therefore, it would be a misunderstanding of subsidiarity to say we should pass this legislation because it happens to be the opinion of the Yukon legislature. Subsidiarity is about something much deeper than that. It is about creating mechanisms to give fulsome responsibility for decision making and for managing the consequences to orders of government that are closest to those directly involved. That might, in certain instances, even be a process that is resisted by those orders of government. However, the principle says better decision making outcomes are likely to result through that type of process.

Beyond that, if I understood him right, the member said he was less interested in engaging with the specific arguments about the points because he objected to the process by which previous changes were brought into YESAA. There is always discussion about mechanisms for doing better consultation for legislation. I know there were many people critical of the government's own approach when it came to consultation around, I think it was Bill S-3, where in fact there was a poor decision and the consultation did not even include the litigants in the initial phase of that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, I do have to allow for other questions.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

• (1900)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I come from a region where the environmental assessment and review procedures are pretty clear for everybody. Not only that, but the environmental assessment and

review procedures that exist in northern Quebec were agreed to by the provincial and federal governments and indigenous peoples. Therefore, they provide clarity for that region. For any type of development in that region, everybody knows what the rules are and what to abide by. I think the legislation before us tends to go in that direction, unlike the previous legislation that the previous government tried to impose on indigenous peoples, which dictated and was contrary to what was in the agreements and treaties in the Yukon.

The member talked about the jurisdictions we have in this country, federal and provincial in particular, and I think they need to be addressed when we talk about environmental assessment review in any part of this country. One of the things that the Supreme Court has mentioned over and over in many decisions over the years was that, in spite of the fact that there are reserved jurisdictions for the federal government, and on the other hand the provincial governments, those jurisdictions are not absolute, and one of the reasons is that there are aboriginal rights in this country that we need to respect when exercising those jurisdictions.

I would like the member's comments on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague made a comment about the importance of indigenous jurisdiction, that it is not just about federal and provincial, that there is indigenous authority and other orders of governments. I do not disagree with that at all.

To come back to the points I made with respect to the legislation, there needs to be a decision-making process that is fair, has clear timelines established, is predictable from the outset, allows all of those who are affected by the process and the project to have input, ultimately allows a decision that reflects the evidence to be made in the best interests of the communities, and makes the decision in a timely manner. Obviously, that decision has to include a multiplicity of different perspectives.

Of course, the member will know that there are a range of different indigenous communities with different kinds of perspectives on development projects. I can say, speaking from the perspective of my province, that there are many indigenous people and communities who are very much in favour of energy development. They believe in it and also benefit directly from it. Of course, there are others that take a different perspective, both in Alberta and elsewhere. However, on balance, I think that the framework established by the previous legislation was better in terms of setting out clear, predictable guidelines and processes.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, while we are debating Bill C-17, which is entirely about rights of people in the Yukon and maintaining a system of environmental reviews that had been negotiated with first nations, we want to put right something that was done wrong in the previous House.

Government Orders

However, I do want to take the member up on a number of the comments he made in relation to pipelines and the people who oppose them. I would like my friend to contemplate the position I take, which is that the problem is not the pipelines but rather what is in them, as long as we are determined to see bitumen mixed with diluent. Based on the best science we have in this country and in the U.S., the senior scientific academy, this is a substance that no one knows how to clean up. Bitumen is only mixed with diluent for the purpose of making it flow through pipelines, because it is a solid. It gets a very low price internationally, because it is a solid.

Certainly, I support upgraders and even support getting upgraders and refineries being built to create jobs in Alberta and pipelines to take a product that Canadians can use so that we can shut down the import of foreign oil to the east coast of Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I think my friend is more direct and in many ways more honest about putting her perspective on the table than some who want to kind of dance around these questions.

Here is the thing about bitumen and energy resources in general. We all use these products. Whether we like it or not, these are all unavoidable parts of our lives. For those who are concerned about the potential risks of moving them and these sorts of things, then the resulting policy conclusion should be trying to reduce the use of these products. However, while we are still using them, while we still use everything from plastics, to jet fuel, to all kinds of different products that come from the energy sector, then we have to extract them and we have to move them. It is not realistic that we can do all of the downstream processing and product development at the very place where they are developed. It would not be practical to have all that labour right beside where these projects are developed. The alternative, then, is to not develop, to get resources from other countries, or to look for reasonable solutions to transportation.

I think all the evidence suggests that pipelines are better than rail from a safety perspective and from an environmental impact perspective, so it behooves us to be realistic and to look at what the resources are that we use and therefore the necessary mechanisms of transportation and development that are associated with them. If we do not look at that, then the alternative is simply that we put ourselves at a massive economic disadvantage compared to other countries that will do this development. Often they will do it in a less environmentally friendly and less human rights friendly way compared to what we are doing here in Canada, and we will find ourselves at a disadvantage for no particular benefit.

That is why I am in favour of development. I am particularly in favour of Canadian development because it is—

•(1905)

The Speaker: Order, please. I believe there is a message from the Senate.

ROYAL ASSENT

•(1915)

[*English*]

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable the Senate

Accordingly the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned:

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that, when the House did attend His Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, His Excellency was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bills:

Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures—Chapter No. 9.

Bill C-18, An Act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act—Chapter No. 10.

Bill S-233, An Act to amend the Customs Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (presentation and reporting requirements)—Chapter No. 11.

Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act—Chapter No. 12.

Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code—Chapter No. 13.

Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to another Act—Chapter No. 14.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

YUKON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, a predominantly small community in a rural riding of eastern Ontario with a significant number of jobs that rely on the land, I chose to participate in today's debate as someone who can empathize with the people of Yukon on how bad federal policy impacts rural people. In addition to representing the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I am pleased to represent the people of northern Ontario as the Conservative Party critic for economic development for that region.

Government Orders

Like my riding in eastern Ontario and like Yukon, northern Ontario shares many of the challenges faced by residents north of the 60th parallel. Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another act, would directly undermine the economic well-being of people living in Yukon, but it should set off alarm bells for every Canadian about what kind of Liberals were elected in Ottawa. Canadians were pitched a story about a new warm and fuzzy, centrist Liberal Party. Instead, they got the old Liberal power brokers, trading votes and money for policies infused with the radical left-wing ideology of paternalist progressivism. It is like Frankenstein's monster. It is alive, and it has the brains of Dalton McGuinty bolted onto the body of a Chrétien-Martin money machine.

Bill C-17 is just the latest example of the horror story that is the current government. It is a story that can be told in three chapters: from cynical vote buying, to an arrogant Ottawa-knows-best attitude, and ending in despair and economic destruction. Let us start at the very beginning, a very good place to start, with chapter 1, entitled, "power brokers, or how I learned to stop stressing and fight the Liberal vote-buying machine".

Bill C-17 comes straight out of the Liberals' campaign platform, so it is important that we look at how it was developed. Unlike our Conservative Party's grassroots approach to policy development, the Liberals outsourced to their pollsters, ad agencies, and special interest groups to cobble together "a chicken in every pot". The pollsters, ad agencies, and focus groups wrote the headline promises the Liberals would promptly break, like Chrétien's promise to scrap the GST, or the current government's promise on electoral reform, or the promise of tiny deficits, or the promise of using deficits for infrastructure, or the promise of eventually ending deficits.

For the rest of the Liberal platform, they hit control *c* to copy and paste lists of demands from various special interests who promise to deliver cash and votes. Those big promises test well but quickly get forgotten while the government gets to work delivering for its friends.

For the big promises the Liberals have not broken yet, the only reason is that, like legal weed, they made the promise having no clue of how they would make it happen. Therefore, they have to commission consultations—which is Liberal code-speak for hire their friends at taxpayer expense—to tell them how to do their job.

The promises in the platform they made to their lobbyist friends is the stuff that gets fast-tracked into legislation, which brings us back to Bill C-17. The government is rushing forward with a blunt instrument to enact a copy-and-past election promise. Instead, it should have worked with all the parties to ensure any amendments protected everyone's interests.

Let us take the section of the bill that would repeal time limits on the review process. The government claims the time limits are unnecessary because the review board already exceeds the current time limits in law. However, time limits provide certainty. That certainty is how we balance the interests of the environment and the interests of the economy. The environmental review is not the economic cost; it might even save the company from an expensive future cleanup. What costs the economy is the uncertainty and its

invisible cost. We cannot see the jobs not created by the investments not made because of the uncertainty the government seeks to create. If the time limits are too short for a thorough review to protect the environment, we should lengthen the times or add additional resources.

• (1920)

The costs of review are recovered from the companies and they will be happy to pay the costs. They just want some certainty about what those costs will be and how long they have to pay for them. That seems like a pretty reasonable compromise. The environment gets protected and Canadians get economic certainty.

Therefore, why is the government being so unreasonable? Removing the time limits means reviews can be indefinitely delayed to satisfy the government's radical left-wing agenda.

That brings us to chapter two: paternalistic progressivism or how to shut up and do what Ottawa says.

Bill C-17 is symbolic of the government's approach to resource development and environmental protection. That approach is to dictate to the provinces and territories. The bill would remove the ability of federal governments to transfer powers, duties, or functions to the Yukon government. It would be one thing if the Liberal government just thought Ottawa knew best and just never used the power under the current law to transfer any power to the Yukon government. However, to repeal that section, to make it so no future government has the legal authority to transfer powers to the territory, shows Ottawa knows best. It is more than just a little attitude; it is part of a larger agenda.

The government clearly seeks to expand its powers and simply order the provinces and territories to do what it says. Look at how it imposed a carbon tax on the provinces. It does not matter if different regions have different economies; Ottawa has ordered a carbon tax, so a carbon tax it will be. Already Canadians living in rural and remote communities like the Yukon pay higher costs for food and energy. Now the government wants these Canadians to pay more for a regressive agenda.

Government Orders

At the very same time it is increasing the cost of doing business in Canada with carbon taxes, it wants to repeal time limits on environmental review. Its agenda is clear. It wants to phase out natural resource development by strangling the industry with higher costs and longer reviews. This is not about carbon emissions or protecting the environment. Nothing in Bill C-17 actually improves environmental protection. All it does is inject uncertainty into the Yukon economy, which is the point: create enough uncertainty and investors will look elsewhere. Of course, the government hopes those investor dollars will flow into one of its super-duper clusters located in urban centres.

That brings us to the final chapter of the Liberal horror story. If this chapter needs a title, it would be, "How the Liberals plan to spread their anti-development agenda across Canada". Bill C-17 is like a Liberal test tube. It makes these changes in Yukon like an experiment to see how well they can strangle development. If they are successful in creating economic uncertainty up north, they will replicate it across the country. In fact, one of the government's very arguments for repeal of the time limits on environmental review is the claim they will be reviewed across Canada, so they might as well do away with Yukon's. This is not a hidden agenda; it just an under-reported agenda.

Bill C-17 is just one part of that agenda. Eliminating the exploration tax credit in the recent budget is another part of that agenda. Removing time limits on environment review is another part. A punishing country-wide carbon tax is just part of the same agenda. Higher taxes, fewer credits, more regulation, and longer reviews are all part of the same Liberal agenda to eliminate our natural resources industries. They will scoff and claim how much they support rural and remote Canada, but actions speak louder than the PMO's scripted talking points.

With every action the government takes, it injects uncertainty into the economy. Even worse, with the government's love of picking industrial winners and losers, we will soon see the hollowing out of many industries in rural and remote parts of Canada. This will force even more Canadians to migrate to the cities, leaving rural Canada even further depopulated. Across Canada, we will see more and more ghost towns.

● (1925)

This is truly a Liberal horror story, but it does not have to end this way. For one, those sitting on the government side could speak up in caucus and call on the government to reconsider. Perhaps there is a compromise that can be found on setting time limits rather than unilaterally repealing them. Did they even try to find one? Sadly, I doubt Canadians can rely on a common-sense revolution within the Liberal back bench.

The only chance will likely be in replacing this incompetent government with one that takes campaign promises seriously, one that takes protecting the environment seriously, one that takes growing our economy seriously. Fortunately for Canadians, we have a Conservative Party with a better story to tell.

For example, we created the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency in 2009, a new stand-alone agency that not only benefited the development of the entire Canadian north, but directly benefited local businesses and entrepreneurs by providing

them with better access to lines of credit, loan guarantees, and other things to foster growth.

Bill S-6, passed in 2015, amended the YESSA and granted further autonomy to Yukon by giving the federal minister the power to delegate federal powers to the Yukon government, or establishing timelines for environmental assessments so the process could be completed in a timely manner, without forgetting the importance of environmental sustainability.

That is just some of what we did for Yukon, which was part of a larger strategy to responsibly develop Canada's natural resources. We can protect the environment and develop our natural resources. It is not even a question of picking between the two. However, the Liberals have decided they will pick. Bill C-17 shows they pick. They picked more uncertainty. They picked less investment. They picked fewer jobs.

Hopefully, when Canadians next go to the polls, they will pick a different government. Hopefully, they will pick the one like they had before. Prior to the last federal election, with a Conservative government in place, Canada was successfully working to secure a position as the world's superpower in energy production. We were ensuring that Canada's precious natural resources were being developed in a way that respected the economy, by creating jobs and respecting the environment, without pitting one against the other.

Unlike the current government, with its policy of burdening future generations with its high deficit policy and the spectre of huge tax increases to pay for out of control spending today, the Conservatives believe a healthy environment and a job should be our legacy for our children's children to enjoy. It was in that context that we brought forth legislation to benefit northerners in the last Parliament.

Bill C-17, in stark contrast to the Conservative policy of job creation and a balanced budget, is symbolic of the government's approach to resource development and environmental protection. The Liberal Party is committed to a policy of fostering a lack of public trust in any environmental process. It is called "delay, delay, delay until the project collapses". It demonstrates to Canadians, and to the world, that confusing environmental regulations and a weak economy go hand in hand, which is the Liberal government's policy on the economy and the environment.

Government Orders

With Bill C-17, Yukon's economic development is in jeopardy. It is an attack on natural resource development. The bill would remove provisions that would limit the length of time for environmental review. This action adds a barrier for investment, as companies are now uncertain as to when a decision will be made. There will be an immediate increase in the regulatory burden on proponents. The mining industry will face the largest impact, and it is a major employer in Yukon.

Bill C-17 would further worsen the economic situation in the north by putting thousands of Canadians out of work, while denying the opportunity of future Canadians to find employment in that region.

The proposed legislation removes northern independence. It is a proven fact that government undermines economic opportunity, in this case Yukon, by adding unnecessary red tape to the environmental review process. It threatens jobs in the private sector and investment.

● (1930)

The Liberal government is taking power away from the people of Yukon and not allowing them to make decisions that concern the development of their communities. Part of the policy interference when it comes to natural resource development is to create uncertainty in the review process. Our Conservative government worked hard to strengthen environmental protections and streamline the regulatory process in order to promote northern development while protecting the unique relationship between northerners and the land.

The removal of time limits and option for exempting renewals fits well with the ongoing narrative that Liberals use a false concern for the environment to introduce unnecessary delays and uncertainty into our regulatory processes. This will impact on the economy, similar in the manner that was used by Gerald Butts, the Prime Minister's principal adviser, and how he directed the Toronto Liberal Party to use the pretext of saving the environment to jack electricity prices to unaffordably high rates in order to shut down tens of thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector in Ontario.

The Liberals' promise to repeal certain sections of previous Conservative government legislation is just another example of how green ideology over there trumps common sense. This change puts Yukon at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of Canada for attracting private investment. Yukon has huge jobs potential that only comes with development. The Liberal government is intent on adding stress to an already troubled industry through the addition of extra red tape, an unclear, unpredictable evaluation system, and the politicization of the final determination of projects.

This legislation hurts workers in Yukon and it hurts the heavily taxed middle class across Canada. Not only do the Prime Minister and his closest Toronto advisers not understand that northern development creates jobs, they prefer to create a patchwork of regulatory regimes across the country with no regard for cross-Canada economic development. There are many other examples of the bad practice of only listening to Toronto-based advisers with under-reported agendas on the environment, agendas that are based on junk science.

This is an intervention where no intervention is necessary. Yukon is already suffering from the federal 2016 budget measure to unfairly tax family campgrounds. It is absolutely ironic when I hear the Liberals claim they will replace lost resource jobs when the legislation we are discussing today goes into effect. They claim that jobs can be replaced by developing tourism. Promote the environment by promoting tourism. It sounds catchy. The reality is the Liberal Party brought in legislation that unfairly targets family-owned campgrounds in its 2016 budget. They reason that some slick city accountants have found a way to create a tax loophole using campgrounds.

The Liberal Party responds by attacking all campgrounds without taking into consideration private, family-run campgrounds. That attack is an insult to every husband and wife team working 18 hours a day in a seasonal business. The Minister of Finance could care less about family campgrounds. He has a vacation property, a holiday villa in the south of France. The Prime Minister uses the taxpayer dime to party in the Caribbean on a friend's private island in the Bahamas, someone who just happens to benefit from receiving millions of dollars in taxpayer handouts from the federal government.

Campgrounds offer an opportunity for families to spend time together, create lifelong memories, and discover Canada's natural landscape. It is an activity dominated by the middle class as their form of rest, relaxation, and entertainment. Camping creates a sense of community that is unique to this form of travel accommodation.

In Yukon, of the 60 campgrounds that operate over 2,000 campsites, there is one federal campground and it has all of 39 sites. Unlike the private campgrounds that are serviced, all the sites at the federal park are unserviced. In addition to providing services like water and sewer hook-up and electrical plug-ins, private campgrounds on average stay open one month longer. Taking away privately owned family campgrounds takes away local tourism in that industry and the jobs that go with it.

● (1935)

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I am taken by the breathtaking scope of the speech by the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. The cogency of the speech is only exceeded by its generosity.

I would like to ask the member a very simple question in regard to the environment. She indicated that the environmental policies of the government are based on junk science. When 98% to 99% of the world's environmental scientists feel that climate change has its causes in human activity, does the member believe that, or does she believe that is also junk science?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak about the environment. The member's riding happens to be along the Ottawa River.

Government Orders

This is another example of how the federal government is trying to take over issues and authorities of local concern. We have our other friend down there who has Motion No. 104. That is a bill to initially study the Ottawa River. In concert with studying the Ottawa River, the government is already trying to set up conservation authorities, taking the authority that the local municipalities have, creating wetlands where private property is, and furthermore driving people out of the area, because they cannot develop, and they are forced to go into the city.

I do not take climate change as my religion. I believe in science. The member's "99% of scientists" figure is incorrect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her speech, which I found rather surprising on a number of levels. I will not belabour all the atrocities she uttered about a number of things.

Among other things, she talked about the importance of the environment and the economy in different regions in the country. Everyone knows that I come from a region where there are extremely strict environmental assessment and review processes, probably among the strictest in Canada, in northern Quebec, under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. At the time, when we signed the James Bay agreement, people were saying more or less the same thing that the hon. member said this evening.

Every time the developers showed up for mining, forestry, or hydro-electricity projects they credited the process in place in James Bay for keeping northern Quebec's economy moving quite well even when Quebec's economy is doing poorly. It is important to know that, especially when the hon. member's government tried to pass a bill to run counter to the agreements that are in place.

I have a specific question for the hon. member on the time limit she wants imposed on assessments.

We cannot impose a time limit on the constitutional rights that exist in this country, and especially the constitutional rights of the indigenous people.

● (1940)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do is give the authority to the Yukon. We are not talking about James Bay or anything else right now. We are talking about the Yukon, where the federal minister gave the authority to the territorial ministers to do what was necessary so that they could develop their resources.

To stop them from developing their resources, with all the environmental processes in place, without some element of certainty, leaves the process open for the "forever neverendum". Nothing gets done. Investors leave.

My goal tonight is to speak to the government's undoing of everything that was promoting economic development in the Yukon previously.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is a straight shooter, and I appreciate her comments. She talked about the increase in red tape,

uncertainty, and this new carbon tax. When I visited Yukon, I saw so much optimism there, so much potential for development. I am concerned that this bill would repeal major sections of Bill S-6, and at the end of the day, it is all about competitiveness.

I know the government is repealing a lot of things, but which part, if repealed, does the member think would be the most damaging to Yukon and its competitiveness?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, in all provinces and territories across Canada, the largest factor contributing to competitiveness—or, rather, non-competitiveness—is the burgeoning carbon tax that is being inflicted upon the provinces and territories. They are being told they have to add this tax. Any tax is going to drive away development. It is a cost on everything one does, everything one consumes across the country.

We have had this experience in Ontario. It was called the global adjustment on electricity bills. This carbon tax has many of the same traits. It is hidden. There will not be a line item. In fact, the government does not even want the budget officer to tell Canadians how much it is going to cost. That is the single greatest detriment to competitiveness across Canada, not just Yukon, and we are all headed for it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke has put herself forward for the first time today as the true voice of Yukoners, and I find that rather shocking. If one speaks for an area that one does not represent, it behooves every member here to do research and find out what the people of that region actually want. The people of that region want this bill to pass as soon as possible.

I recommend that the hon. member give a phone call to the president of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, Mike Burke, who has called for this legislation to pass as quickly as possible. If what the previous government forced through the House, violating the rights of first nations, was so massively popular, then perhaps it would be Ryan Leef sitting over there instead of the hon. member for Yukon. This bill was an affront to first nations' rights.

It is not about promoting development. This is something that all in this House should want to pass as quickly as possible, because the unanimous will of the Yukon legislature is to pass Bill C-17 as quickly as possible.

● (1945)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, the member for Yukon should be ashamed of himself. I look forward to the day when Ryan Leef is back here, sitting with the Conservatives in a majority government in 2019. The bill that Conservatives passed handed the powers to Yukon; this bill takes them away.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will read something, "Climate change is a fact. It is a threat. It is man-made. We have to do something about it, and that something includes putting a price on carbon." I agree with this sentiment. We just heard it. I agree with the sentiment, but the quote is not mine. It belongs to the leader of the Ontario PC Party, Patrick Brown.

Government Orders

I wonder if my colleague across the way agrees with his view. Is he peddling a conspiracy theory? Is it junk science? What is Mr. Brown up to? I wonder if she could enlighten the House.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite better check his phone and GPS. This is not the Ontario legislature. This is the federal Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my great privilege to rise today to speak to Bill C-17, a bill that would change significant amounts of a bill that was passed in the previous parliament, Bill S-6.

It is with some reluctance that I stand up today. I am quite concerned about the direction the current government is going. In particular, I am convinced that the government is certain that it does not want resource development to happen in this country. However, the Liberals are not willing to come out and directly say that. No, they are going to ensure resource development does not happen in this country in much the same way as they did when they said that they approved pipelines to the coast. They said, "We approved pipelines to the coast", but they have no interest in those pipelines actually getting built.

I am going to be sharing my time with the member for Lakeland.

I sit on the northern and aboriginal affairs committee. I represent 14 first nations or Métis communities in my riding in northern Alberta. The north is where I come from. I always say to the people from Thunder Bay that if it is not still light at 11:30, they are really not in the north yet. They have to go where there is pretty much 24 hours of sunlight to understand what the north is all about.

However, it does give me some perspective for sure. Yukon is within sight, I like to say. I can nearly spit from my riding and hit Yukon, so it is within sight, so to speak, and I have some understanding of how things operate in the north.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Can you see Russia from where you are?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I am sure that from the Yukon they can spit, and they see Russia for sure. We are definitely having a good time here tonight, Mr. Speaker.

I meet often with first nations people in my riding, and one of the things they say is that they always look at everything for seven generations. They often talk about their seven generations. They look down the road seven generations. They know whatever they are doing today will have an impact and they want to make sure that what they do today has beneficial impacts seven generations from now.

I would argue that the current government is definitely not taking that approach. Particularly when it comes to their deficit spending and the massive debt that they are taking on, the Liberals are not looking at how the seven generations that follow us in this place are going to have to deal with bringing the debt and the deficit under control. I would say that we need to look to our first nations communities for that example of considering the seven generations. That is very important for them, and it is something that we can embrace in this place. In everything we do, we can consider how it is going to affect the next seven generations. I very much reprimand the current government for its use of taxpayer dollars, its use of

deficit spending, and the ballooning of our debt from that particular perspective.

I also would like to comment a bit about the resource development that happens in the north. In the party that I come from, we often talk about resource development. It is something we say all the time, but we do not necessarily put how it affects everyday life into more concrete terms. Resource development in my riding is heavily based in the primary industry sectors, such as agriculture, mining, forestry, the oil fields, and those kinds of things. We talk about it, but then we still do not necessarily know what it means or how it impacts our individual lives.

I would ask members to take a look around them. They are going to see wood. That comes from the logging industry in this country. I imagine that the pads in front of us are made from some sort of plastic material. That comes from the oil patch. If we look around us, we are going to see some metal that came from mining. The copper wiring that we see all around us comes from a copper mine. I know that in northern B.C. there is a large copper mine that I have driven by before. All of these kinds of things make our lives better. That is the real point.

I come from an automotive background. I worked as an automotive mechanic. I definitely think that automobiles have made our lives better. The fact that we can get from point A to point B in a relatively short time is something that even my grandparents, when they were my age, would never have considered, or that we would be able to drive 100 kilometres an hour for 12 hours at a time without any major breakdowns.

● (1950)

That we can get across this country in less than a day is still mind-boggling to my grandparents. All of the resource development, all of those things that start out in rural Canada, have an impact on our everyday lives. All of those things say nothing to the person who has that job at that mine, that sawmill, that oil installation, or that refinery. I know several people who are gold miners in Yukon. It is an adventure and a great thing for the people who gold-mine in the Yukon. I think there is even a TV show about it. However, it also puts food on the table for their family.

I have a quote from Chief Joachim Bonnetrouge, who is not from Yukon but the Northwest Territories. He testified at the committee with respect to our suicide study. I think this quote is fitting for this discussion as well. He said:

I was told a couple of weeks ago that the unemployment rate in our community is 54%. And you mentioned self-esteem. Boy, if the band or a band company could create some jobs.... If you have a family and a father, and they could give him a job, holy man...that would make a big difference in anybody's life.

That is what we are talking about today: jobs for people in the north of Canada, jobs for people to provide their family with an income, food, clothing, and shelter. That is what the economy is all about, providing people with the ability to provide their family with food, clothing, and shelter.

Government Orders

The other thing that comes with the economy is wealth creation. We hear more and more all the time at the northern and aboriginal affairs committee how we are not managing wealth, we are managing poverty. The first nations communities across this country are saying that they are living in third world conditions, and I agree with that to some degree. However, the trouble is we are not allowing wealth creation to happen in those places. We have to unshackle these communities and allow them to pursue wealth creation. To do that we need to get investment to come in. That goes to the very heart of this bill. With this bill, and the time frames being extended, or with no end dates being put on them, we are not bringing it in. People who have a billion dollars to invest anywhere in the world will look around the world and say that Yukon is unstable, and that they are not quite sure how long they will have to work there before the project that they think will make them money will actually get going, so they would rather go to a jurisdiction where they know and understand the timelines.

What we really need to do is allow the investments to come in to the north to provide the people who live there the jobs they need to provide for their family. In the process, they will produce a product out there that the rest of the world can use to make their lives better. The stuff that we develop in Canada we export around the world. That makes the lives of people all around the world better. Therefore, we need to ensure that the investments come to northern Canada, and that development happens in northern Canada so that the people who live in those communities can make the quality of their life better, and that with those products that are produced in those communities and shipped around the world, Canadians will make every person's life in the entire world better.

With that, I will wrap it up. This bill is wrong-headed because it takes out a number of things that had brought stability to Yukon. We will see a withdrawal of investment in that area, and it says nothing to what will happen to the current projects that will be sitting in limbo after this bill is passed.

I look forward to the questions.

• (1955)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the record I want to clarify the member's very last comment. There will not be any projects left in limbo.

On the day Bill C-17 receives Royal Assent, section 49.1, of the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act* is repealed. Projects that have been submitted to a decision body, prior to that day, for an exemption from assessment and have received, before that day, a positive decision (or as the quote above states "were greenlit without additional review") continue to enjoy the benefits of that decision and do not have to be reassessed.

Therefore, the certainty this bill will put in place and that that has brought about the court case, and the uncertainty related to a potential abrogation of the treaty, and the letter of the law, if not the spirit of the law, I think will allay the member's fears in his last comment.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for allying my fears on that.

The member said there are groups that have had a decision made, and those decisions will not be overturned. As far as I understand, there is a number of groups that are either in the process of having it reviewed or have submitted but are not in the process yet. There is

some confusion as to what is going to happen with those particular groups.

That said, the underlying premise of my entire speech is that we need the development of the north to ensure that the people who live in the north have their lives made better. In that process, they can make the lives of all Canadians, and people around the world, better through the products that are produced right here in Canada.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment from my colleague on the Standing Committee for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

I listened carefully to his speech. Some parts are good; some parts are troubling. As members know, I come from a region where the rules are pretty tight and pretty severe in terms of environmental assessment and review of projects, whether they be mining projects or forestry projects or hydro development projects.

Where there are rules that are strict, I believe there is certainty, because every player will know by which rules they need to play in any given territory. This is what this bill is all about. This is why indigenous people in particular who hold constitutional rights in the region need this as well. They have agreed to this bill for that.

I want to ask the same question I asked the member's colleague previously. There is talk about imposing a time limit on environment assessments, something which I wholeheartedly disagree with because constitutional rights of indigenous peoples do not have time limits. They exist now; they existed yesterday; they will continue to exist tomorrow.

Time limits cannot be imposed on constitutional rights. Whatever time it will take to consult with indigenous peoples is a constitutional duty that we need to undertake every time.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, he talks about how the rules are tight in the James Bay agreement. There comes a significant level of certainty with the tight rules. I think we both agree on the fact that the certainty is what allows groups to move in and understand what the process is, that they have to go through the process, and at the end of they will have a yes or no. They will get to proceed, or the project does not proceed.

One of the defences of the bill that was tabled by the government is that the current projects are doing their assessments in less than a third of the time that is allocated by the certainty of the long date, the 18-month period. What that has allowed is that at 18 months, there is going to be a yes or a no. That provides certainty.

The member said that in the James Bay agreement there is certainty. This, as well, is certainty. I think we are undermining that certainty by just leaving it open-ended on the extended date.

• (2000)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking against the proposed amendments for Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act.

Government Orders

The bill seeks to reverse progress in Yukon's economic and natural resources development. For years, northerners have built and relied on their increasingly thriving economy, unlocking the opportunity and prosperity of their natural resources. From mining, to hunting, to tourism, Canada's northern territories are an important and strategic asset to Canada's future.

The YESAA became law in 2003. The goal of that original bill was to develop a single development assessment process for projects on all federal, territorial, and first nations land in Yukon. Part of the legislation included a mandatory review after five years of becoming law. The review was a joint initiative of the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Governments of Canada and Yukon, and was completed successfully in March 2012. These changes were formally introduced in Bill S-6 in 2014, which intended to make northern regulatory regimes more consistent with those in the south in order to attract investment and expand economic opportunities now and for future generations.

The bill, which was called the Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act, amended both YESAA and the Nunavut Waters and Nunavut Surface Rights Tribunal Act, and was part of a broader suite of reforms intended to give northerners greater control over their resources and to help promote resource development and economic growth.

The changes to Nunavut's regulatory regime have not been controversial. Bill S-6 reflected many of the jointly agreed upon findings for the five-year review of YESAA, but also reflected changes to regulatory regimes in the rest of Canada, as well as input from Yukon's government.

Bill C-17 proposes to repeal many of the changes enabled by Bill S-6. These include removing time limits on the steps in the review process, removing an exemption for projects that have already been approved through the assessment process, removing the ability for the federal minister to provide binding policy direction to the board, and removing the ability to delegate the federal minister's powers, duties, or functions under the act to the territorial government.

At its core, the bill would make natural resources development much more difficult in Yukon for project proponents and investors. It would slow down the review process by increasing the number of projects that need to be reviewed and by removing timelines for approval. It would also damage industry and investment confidence in the regulatory regime. It is a step backward for the self-determination of Yukoners, because it takes away northern control over northern resources and puts it in the hands of federal ministers and of MPs from large, southern urban centres. Northerners know their needs and capabilities best and they should be equipped and empowered to make decisions for themselves.

However, Canadians should not be surprised. The Liberals have shown their cards, sometimes on purpose, sometimes accidentally, that prove they are fundamentally anti-Canadian energy and anti-Canadian resource development. The bill is another part of their plan to dismantle Canada's successful natural resources development.

Bill C-17 brings more uncertainty to the resource development review process that will undermine economic opportunities for all Yukoners. It also introduces new uncertainty for the rest of Canada

about whether it is a template for the basis of Liberal policy going forward.

I had the amazing opportunity to visit Yukon last summer. Of course, the landscapes are breathtaking, the resources vast, and the people are friendly. However, what stood out to me was an almost universal and distinct, independent, pioneering, adventurous spirit, and a deep appreciation and abiding love for their land. It is the same can-do streak of Canadian miners.

The most important sector of Yukon's economy is mining. The territory is extremely rich in mineral potential. The main resources mined are gold, which in 2011 accounted for 70% of metal mining, copper, zinc, lead, tungsten, silver, and coal.

Yukon has some of the largest iron ore and zinc deposits in the world. There are over 80 mineral resource deposits there with enormous economic potential. Last year, more than \$300 million was spent on exploration and mineral production soared above \$400 million, from just \$46 million in 2006, according to the Yukon Chamber of Mines.

The mining sector in Yukon is very successful, but it has challenges. Difficult access and rugged terrain of the territory make it difficult to access many of these deposits. That is where the federal government can assist, by investing in infrastructure and making it easier for developers to access resources across the territory, given all of the challenges.

Bill C-17 would not make any of this easier. In fact, it would make mining more difficult for many families who have been in the industry for generations.

• (2005)

Last fall, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources heard from several witnesses during a study on the future of the mining sector in Canada. Mike McDougall is the president of the Klondike Placer Miners' Association. He came to Ottawa representing the 160 family-owned and operated placer mines in Yukon. I would like to share his thoughts on Bill C-17. He said:

YESAA defines much of how the placer industry's operations are assessed for impacts and how these impacts are mitigated. Placer mining is the single-largest client of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board...

Government Orders

Issues such as costly and time-consuming reassessments for unchanged projects, inconsistency and lack of accountability between designated offices, and a lack of clear timelines all leave our industry with uncertainty. The amendments were meant to bring YESAA into line with the other Canadian jurisdictions, provide certainty for investment, and allow the Yukon to be competitive. As the government is now prepared to amend this legislation once again, we would like to see these issues addressed in the amended bill.

The federal government has heard the concerns of the first nations. As the number one client and end-user of the YESAA process, the KPMA expects that government will engage with us prior to finalizing any amendments.

Mr. McDougall's testimony highlights how uncertainty and ongoing regulatory changes and challenges will hinder their ability to fully engage in northern development, which should be a serious concern to the Liberals, since mining is the most important part of Yukon's economy. Putting up more roadblocks and adding more red tape is not the answer. Bill C-17 adds a barrier for investment as companies would be uncertain as to when a decision will be made.

Furthermore, the bill would immediately increase the regulatory burden and major costs for proponents, which would impact many working Yukoners and their families, since mining is a major employer in the territory. The bill would worsen the economic situation in the north by putting thousands out of work.

The Liberals claim consultation as a cornerstone of their platform, and they consistently refer to it as an important part of their legislative process, but in this case stakeholders such as the KPMA, which would be impacted significantly, were not consulted before the changes presented in Bill C-17 were hastily introduced last spring.

The Liberals' Ottawa-centric agenda is not working, and worse yet, they are not listening to those who are and will be worse off because of it. Their promise to simply repeal the controversial sections of Bill S-6 is yet another example of how they made promises during the election campaign without considering the consequences. Now they put Yukon at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of Canada for attracting private investment.

Their regulatory changes are not the only ways they are harming the north, though. The Liberals' carbon tax burdens northerners, their businesses, and their families more than any other region in the entire country. People in northern territories are already required to pay more in fuel and transportation expenses just to sustain the basic necessities of life and to get essentials to their communities. The carbon tax will victimize people who rely on these services.

The Prime Minister said his plan will be good for the economy, good for innovation, and good for jobs, but it is just not true. His carbon tax will cripple industry, hinder the economy, and drive up the cost of living for northerners. It will also mean northerners will pay more for food that is already more than four times more expensive than the costs elsewhere, along with other essential goods and products. Electricity will become unaffordable to communities that do not have any other source but diesel. In the north, the carbon tax is really a tax on living. In a place where home heating and travelling long distances is part of life, northerners cannot afford it, particularly when legislation like Bill C-17 forces further barriers to their most important economic driver, Canada's world-class mining sector.

Whether it is higher taxes, more red tape, or ongoing uncertainty, the Liberals make it clear that developing Canada's natural resources will be more difficult than ever before, everywhere. At a time when technology, research and development, and innovation are at an all-time high, the Liberals are attacking the very people who are ensuring the long-term and sustainable development of natural resources in Canada.

The bill would not help Yukon, a territory rich in natural beauty, natural resources, and irreplaceable human capital. The Liberals are limiting opportunities for future generations and are just adding challenges to the north. The Liberals need to do what they have pledged all along. They need to listen.

That is why I oppose these amendments.

Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, the sub-amendment and the amendment to the second reading motion of Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, respectively standing in the name of the Member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa and the Member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, be deemed negated on division.

• (2010)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The House has heard the terms of the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to put two points on the record about improvements in the bill since a number of speeches may have been formulated. One is related to timelines. There are timelines now in the process and they are done locally. They are done by the board and gazetted so everyone has their say. The fear about timelines no longer exists.

The other point is about reassessments. A new mechanism in the bill would allow an assessment to be for longer than just the next licence, possibly for the life of the project, so there would not have to be a reassessment partway through. These two improvements would reduce some of the concerns people had about the bill.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, there is a larger issue, though, about the Liberal track record of creating uncertainty and ongoing regulatory changes for natural resources right across the board, whether it is for Yukon, LNG, pipelines, or energy development. I think all members in the House believe in the duty of the crown to consult in a robust and comprehensive regulatory process, balancing local concerns, first nations concerns, environmental concerns, and economic opportunities.

I hope, as we go forward, the Liberals become more unequivocal about their support for natural resources development right across the board for all Canadians, all the opportunities and prosperity that will provide for future generations, and the importance of natural resources development for all economies across Canada.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it sounded like the entire Yukon was doomed as I listened to the member's speech. I would like an explanation. I know of many regions in the country where there are strict environmental and social assessment rules and the economies in those regions generally go very well. I would like the member to point to examples or experiences where these kinds of rules exist and the economies of those regions have gone bust.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the track record of Canadian resource development, from LNG to pipelines, to oil and gas to mining is world class. Alberta, in particular, but Canada, in general, had long track record of the most stringent and rigorous regulatory assessment processes for all kinds of natural resources development, which always involved consultations with first nations people, as is the duty of the crown, as well as with stakeholders, assessments of economic opportunities, and balancing environmental sustainability. That is the very thing about Canada. We produce natural resources development in the most sustainable and responsible way in the world.

Not only do we export needed products across the globe, as well as technology and expertise, we also offer the world a decades-long track record of exactly how to do regulatory assessments in a way that is predictable, stimulates economic opportunities, prosperity in jobs for future generations, and unlocks the potential for natural resources development. It is only the left that seems confused about whether Canada has a strong regulatory process. We always have. We do in mining and all kinds of other energy development.

• (2015)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a litany of potential disaster on our natural resource development across the way. The Liberals are changing the assessment processes, bringing uncertainty to both natural resource development and environmental protection, putting political opinion and spin ahead of science, mocking first nations by refusing to respect transparency laws that are already in place, and playing games with people's lives through a carbon tax.

Does the member think the divisiveness being caused by the government is going to be more or less than the divisions caused by the Prime Minister's father?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, certainly the disconnect and the anger at Ottawa from the people I represent is greater and stronger than it has ever been in my lifetime. I would say that this Prime Minister is following down the exact same path as former

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prime minister Trudeau, his father, by pitting regions against regions, sectors against sectors, provinces against provinces, and people against people.

I hope that one day the Liberals will actually walk the talk about uniting Canadians.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 30, the recorded division stands deferred until Tuesday, June 20, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As much as we are enjoying ourselves, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find it the will of the House to call it midnight at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is there unanimous consent to see the clock at midnight?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a need for the federal government to listen to questions rather than mindlessly repeat Gerald Butts/PMO hive talking points, which are an insult to all Canadians.

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In this case, the government member in his canned, mansplained response was confused about his own party's budget. If he had read the federal budget, on page 89 of the budget document, he would have seen it clearly states the budget would:

Transfer remaining uncommitted funds from older federal infrastructure programs to municipalities through the Gas Tax Fund in 2016-17.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I just want to remind the hon. members that adjournment proceedings are in place, and there are members speaking. It is nice to see everyone get along and be glad to get out, but maybe just let us finish up in peace and quiet. Then we will get out of here faster.

● (2020)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the so-called uncommitted funds from Conservative legacy programs were accumulated without raising taxes and when the federal budget had been balanced.

When the Liberal Party took office in November 2015, there was \$837 million available for transfer to municipalities across the country. According to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, less than five months later, on budget day, \$805,887,514 had disappeared. This left \$30.1 million, which was transferred to the federal gas tax fund on March 31, 2017.

My question for the minister was this: Where did the money go? The talking point claimed, without answering the original question, and I quote from *Hansard*, March 10, 2017:

We have fulfilled that promise to transfer over to the gas tax funds the appropriate amounts allocated.

In fact, the federal government's own press release announcing the transfer of \$30.1 million is dated March 31, 2017. The March 10 response was clearly intended to mislead the House, as the transfer occurred after I asked my question. More important, it did not address the question of the missing \$805 million.

How else is the government misleading Canadians about infrastructure spending?

In response to an Order Paper question, the Liberal Party said, in November 2015, that \$194,164 was available to be transferred to Prince Edward Island through the gas tax fund. By May 5, 2017, that figure had been changed to \$12. By the government's own figures, the March 2017 transfer figure was then changed to \$228,652.

Newfoundland and Labrador figures contain the same discrepancies. The original figure provided by the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities was \$1,404,252. That figure was then changed in response to another Order Paper question to read \$1,012,269. It then claimed that \$380,931 was available for the gas tax transfer, a substantially reduced figure from the \$1,366,972 number that had already been provided by the federal government on a different document.

The figures provided by the Minister of Infrastructure for the Province of Quebec showed \$208,416,418 available for transfer. This figure had been reduced down to \$6,014,015 on the day of the federal budget.

In another sleight-of-hand response to another question to the government, the \$208 million was changed to \$104,783,324, with

\$5,844,612 the now revised amount available for transfer to municipalities through the federal gas tax fund.

Do members see the pattern? None of the figures add up.

Now we get to Ontario. The first figure provided as being available to transfer to municipalities through the federal gas tax transfer was \$558,678,458. Four months later, the figure is \$13,327,279. By the following year, the first figure had been reduced to \$548,900,914, and the amount on budget day had been changed to \$13,778,243.

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is dedicated to ensuring that its investments support the infrastructure Canadians need and use every day.

Infrastructure Canada has worked closely with partners to expand eligibility requirements and accelerate the funding being delivered under its old programs and to quickly move forward with new programs to support projects across the country.

[*Translation*]

When we took office in November 2015, \$837 million was lying dormant in outdated funds that were several years old and had not been allocated to infrastructure projects. Unlike the previous government, we have been working closely with the provinces and territories to identify projects and allocate those residual amounts before March 31, 2017. In one year, we were able to allocate more than \$800 million from those old programs to infrastructure projects right across the country.

For instance, we contributed \$47 million in federal funding to widen Highway 417 from Maitland Avenue to Island Park Drive in Ottawa. We allocated \$21.9 million in federal funding towards renovating Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal. We also contributed \$54 million in federal funding towards the construction of Le Diamant theatre, in Quebec City. The remaining \$30 million from past programs was transferred to agreement holders at the end of March to allow Canada's communities to invest that money according to their priorities.

● (2025)

[*English*]

Since its introduction, the gas tax fund has provided more than \$7 billion for municipal infrastructure projects in Ontario alone.

This permanent source of funding continues to offer local communities the flexibility to make strategic investments across 18 different project categories, including public transit, roads, culture, sport, and recreation. By funding the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure and the building of new construction, the gas tax fund boosts local employment and growth of the middle class.

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The Government of Canada is committed to working with provinces, territories, municipalities, and key stakeholders such as the Union des municipalités du Québec and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to ensure our municipalities continue to receive the support they need in a streamlined fashion and a consistent, coherent fashion to build strong and vibrant communities.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, so where did the missing infrastructure funds for Ontario really go if not the federal infrastructure bank, the pay-to-borrow scheme?

The \$805 million missing federal infrastructure dollars were found sitting in Toronto buried in a line item as, and I quote from the 2016 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, unassigned “federal contributions to provincial infrastructure”.

The Liberal Party of Toronto received one big fat cheque from the Liberal Party in Ottawa for the missing \$805 million, which was apparently used to deceive the provincial taxpayers of Ontario about balancing a budget.

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, the federal gas tax fund is predictable, flexible, long term, and stable funding that is crucial to community infrastructure. Municipalities have the flexibility to direct federal funding toward projects they identify as a priority.

[*Translation*]

Transferring the remaining \$30 million from old programs to the federal gas tax fund is an effective way to support municipalities' investments.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada is committed to working with provinces, territories, and municipalities, as well as with key partners such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Union des municipalités du Québec to ensure that these people have the support they need to build and fulfill their needs and to build strong, stronger, and inclusive communities.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last time we had this conversation, we were talking about the government's willingness to support members of my community on Gabriola Island within my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith in their opposition to the proposal for five new commercial deep sea anchorages. These are causing great concern in my community, as is evidenced by the hundreds of petition signatures I have tabled in the House.

Gabriola Island is my home along with thousands of other people in my community. I feel strongly about it, especially given that the proposal to establish new anchorages is to facilitate exports of thermal coal from Wyoming, which no U.S. port would allow to exit through their ports. The port of Vancouver, despite universal opposition from surrounding British Columbia municipalities, agreed to facilitate their exports.

It has no visible community benefits. It threatens our community and our coastline and is creating great anxiety. We do not want the Minister of Transport to approve these anchorages. Not going forward with these anchorages would have multiple benefits.

First is the respect for the rights of indigenous people. It is Snuneymuxw First Nation territory. The environmental overview assessment described the process as inadequate. It said, “the lack of public and First Nations consultation leaves potential for significant effects to occur within social components...”

Second, we could save our coast from an oil spill. Five years ago when I was chair of Islands Trust Council, three bulk carriers within Plumper Sound dragged their anchors and came very close to landing on the shoreline. The Department of Ecology oil spill coordinator on the Washington State side, Dale Jensen, said that damage to fuel tanks on a cargo ship that size could have oiled the islands on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border.

Third, cancellation would give time for the industry to fix its reputation in existing anchorages. Plumper South, Protection Island, and Cowichan Bay all experience ongoing visual diesel smoke, generator noise, and excess light pollution. Industry has not chosen to mitigate any of those consequences. Again, this is all downside, no upside for these communities.

Fourth, it would allow decisions to be based on science, facts and evidence. The Conservative Party having gutted the Fisheries Act means the habitat impact on fisheries in our area has not been assessed.

Fifth, it would protect species at risk. We both have glass sponge reefs, amazing treasures of the deep ocean in the Salish Sea, which are not fully mapped and explored. This is also a transit and feeding area for the southern resident orca whale, which is listed as endangered or threatened under the Species at Risk Act.

It would build Canada's reputation as a country that is willing to act on climate change and it would support many elected bodies opposed to the anchorage establishment.

Will the minister assure residents of Gabriola Island and users of the Salish Sea that he will not approve the five bulk commercial anchorages off Gabriola Island?

● (2030)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for her advocacy.

Trade is a key priority for our government and for Canadians. Canada's trade with countries in the Asia-Pacific region continues to grow. As these trade volumes rise, our west coast ports, our gateways, experience increased activity. This means that on occasion more vessels are ready to enter the port than there are berths available at terminals.

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There is, generally speaking, an effective system for managing these vessels at Canadian port authorities and public ports. In order to ensure the safe and secure movement of marine traffic, ships that are waiting to dock at a Canada port authority or a public port are directed to a designated anchorage within the port's waters, pending the availability of a berth at the appropriate facility or terminal.

Under the Canada Marine Act, Canada port authorities and public ports have the authority to assign and manage anchorage spots within their area of jurisdiction. If a ship arrives at a port but no berth is available at the terminal, the port directs it to wait at a designated anchorage within the port's jurisdiction. From time to time, anchorages within port's boundaries may be full or a vessel may be too large for a port's designated anchorages. In these cases, the vessel would need to anchor outside the port's waters.

In recent years, the west coast in particular has seen an increase in the use of local anchorages due to high volumes of traffic. We are aware this creates significant concern for local communities affected by vessel noise and lights.

The Canada Shipping Act currently does not provide for the Governor in Council or the Minister of Transport to designate, approve, or manage anchorage sites in waters outside of the jurisdiction of Canada port authorities and public ports.

Our government recognizes that the environmental integrity of Canadian waters is essential to the well-being of our marine transportation system. Developing a process to identify and manage anchorages outside of a Canada port authority or public port is one of the many important marine safety initiatives in Canada's oceans protection plan. This work, involving technical experts and stakeholder and community consultation, will help to ensure Canada continues to prosper economically, while protecting our marine environment.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I will note again for the member's information. This is not a Canadian product or a Canadian appetite. This is not trade. This is Wyoming coal to be burned in power plants in China. This has nothing to do with Canadian benefit.

Two weeks ago the government launched a review process of the Canadian Pilotage Act. A number of participants who will be invited are named, including indigenous groups, which I do not think is in keeping with the government's commitment to indigenous government in a nation-to-nation relationship. We will ensure that a government-to-government relationship is carried out.

However, the list does not mention local governments, such as the Gabriola Local Trust Committee, the Regional District of Nanaimo and Islands Trust Council, all the governments that are on record as opposed to the establishment of these new bulk anchorages. Neither does it include groups like the chamber of commerce or the Gabriolans Against Freighter Anchorages Society.

Will the minister's representative assure me that such groups that have a very strong stake in the outcome of this review will be warmly invited inside the process?

• (2035)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, Canada port authorities are critical to our trade dependent economy, providing a safe, secure, efficient and environmentally sustainable marine transportation

system. Anchorages are an integral part of an efficient shipping and navigation system.

Considering the effects the use of anchorages may have on the environment remains a priority. Under Canada oceans protection plan, we are committed to develop and implement a process to identify and manage new anchorages outside Canada port authorities or public ports. This would be done, taking into account various risks to marine safety, security and the environment, and will include consultation of local community stakeholders and experts.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have done the previous four times with these late shows on the Canadian autism partnership, we are broadcasting this one via Facebook Live again, which is an interesting opportunity for Canadians to hear yet the same answers over and over again. We have had five opportunities now to do this, this being our fifth.

Interestingly, this is our fifth different parliamentary secretary. We have had the parliamentary secretary for health and the parliamentary secretary for persons with disabilities and sport. Interestingly, we have had the parliamentary secretary for revenue. We have had the parliamentary secretary for defence, who did not do a very good job defending the Liberal position on this.

Interestingly, we now have the parliamentary secretary for transport answering a question about a Canadian autism partnership. Maybe that is fitting, given the number of Canadians who travel from jurisdiction to jurisdiction to get evidence-based treatment in this country.

I will provide a bit of history of the Canadian autism partnership for those who have not been following along.

In 2015, our government established an expert working group of 12 prominent Canadian experts on autism to put together a plan for a Canadian autism partnership. This working group worked with a team of seven incredible self-advocates who worked alongside it. They worked with families. They listened to almost 5,000 submissions. They met with provincial and territorial governments across the country, every single province and territory in Canada, to get input into the business plan that they brought forward in the fall of 2016. They brought that business plan forward with an ask for \$19 million over five years, just \$3.8 million a year. That is a dime per Canadian per year.

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The Canadian autism partnership would bring these experts together to work with families, with stakeholders, with self-advocates, and with some of the top researchers in the world right here in Canada. It would advise governments in their jurisdictions on the real challenges facing families and individuals living with autism in Canada in the areas of, for example, education, early intervention, housing, vocation, a lot of the difficult transitions that people with autism have across their lifespan, and maybe mental health issues in some places, and provide absolute, solid, evidence-based advice, the best advice gathered from jurisdictions around the world to serve Canadians living with autism.

Unbelievably, although half of the Liberal caucus signed support letters in support of the Canadian autism partnership, it did not find its way into the budget, into a budget that ran a deficit of \$25 billion a year. The government could not find \$3.8 million to fund the Canadian autism partnership, which was years in the making, with thousands of people weighing in.

What we will probably hear from the parliamentary secretary is what we have heard 15 times in question period and four times during the late show. She will probably list off measures that the previous Conservative government funded, measures like ready, willing, and able, community works, the autism surveillance program, or \$39 million in research. We have talked time and again about what those researchers want. Four of them were on the Canadian autism partnership working group. What they want more than anything else is for their research to actually be used to benefit Canadians in areas like early intervention, education, housing, vocation, and other things.

Though I will not hold my breath, what I am hoping we will hear from the parliamentary secretary is a reason why, while every Conservative, New Democrat, and Green member of Parliament voted yes to the Canadian autism partnership, every single Liberal voted no except for one.

• (2040)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the hon. member for his question and his advocacy.

Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, want what is best for their children, just as all parents do.

The Government of Canada recognizes that children and adults with autism have different needs that have to be addressed so they can reach their full potential.

[*Translation*]

The federal government invests considerable sums every year to build skills and support training by filling knowledge gaps and supporting research aimed at making sure children and adults affected by autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, and their families can get the best support and treatment available.

[*English*]

Recent investments have enabled autism researchers in universities and research institutions from across the country to contribute to the ongoing efforts to advance our knowledge about the underlying causes of ASD, and to translate that knowledge into

better diagnostic tools and treatments. It has also enabled Canadian researchers to be recognized as global leaders in this area, and to participate in major global research initiatives on autism.

[*Translation*]

Federal investment in research has a real impact on the lives of people with ASD and their families. That is why our government made significant investments in research and innovation in the last two federal budgets.

[*English*]

For instance, in budget 2016, the federal government announced a new ongoing investment of \$30 million per year to support investigator-led research through CIHR. This investment represented the highest amount of new annual funding for discovery health research in more than a decade.

In budget 2016, the federal government also announced an investment of \$20 million over three years to Brain Canada to continue efforts toward increasing our understanding of the brain and brain health. This contributed to bringing investments for the Canada brain research fund to \$240 million. With more than 800 researchers at 112 institutions, the Canada brain research fund represents the largest public-private fund in Canadian history devoted to supporting brain research.

[*Translation*]

Thanks to this initiative, Brain Canada has supported 13 research projects in areas related to ASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders with funding totalling \$16.7 million.

[*English*]

Beyond research and data, we are also investing in initiatives that will make a tangible and practical difference for individuals living with autism in Canada. The \$40-million opportunities fund, delivered regionally and nationally through Service Canada centres, is supporting individuals with disabilities, including autism, by providing a range of tools and services that will help them prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment.

In closing, I would like to affirm that the Government of Canada is committed to our continued collaboration with provincial and territorial partners and with autism organizations that are working to support families. We will continue to work collaboratively to align priorities—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

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Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, those watching will note again that there is absolutely zero reason given yet by the current Liberal government for its refusal to fund the Canadian autism partnership. I am going to read a quote, one of my favourite quotes from Jerry Rice, of NFL Hall of Fame: “Today I will do what others won't, so tomorrow I can accomplish what others can't.”

I am determined to see the Canadian autism partnership come to reality. I know that Canadian families living with autism and Canadians living with autism are equally determined.

We live in a democracy. I encourage those Canadians to continue to reach out to the Liberal MPs through Twitter, through Facebook, through email, and through phone calls. I would ask this in closing: when people do that, is this Liberal member open to changing her mind and supporting Canadians living with autism?

● (2045)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, the proposal put forward by the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance for a Canadian

autism partnership has served to highlight the complex challenges facing families affected by ASD. That is why federally we are supporting a range of initiatives that are needed to truly make a difference for families and that increase the societal inclusion and participation of Canadians with disabilities or functional limitations.

The government will continue to engage with a range of stakeholders on autism to identify effective, responsible opportunities for partnerships to support a better quality of life for those living with autism and their families.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:46 p.m.)

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